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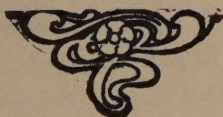
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THE COURT OF PILATE

A STORY OF JERUSALEM IN THE DAYS OF CHRIST

BY
ROE R. HOBBS

Illustrations by
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R. F. FENNO & COMPANY
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The Court of Pilate

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THE COURT OF PILATE

THE COURT OF PILATE

CHAPTER I.

THE HEEL OF THE ROMAN.

AN ominous silence, eloquent in its terrible significance of the tense state of public feeling, reigned over the city of Jerusalem. Outspoken threats and complaints were few, but in the homes, on the streets and in the places of trading men met each other with a glance wherein was expressed the most violent hatred of the existing government, or congregated in groups to discuss with bated breath, not daring to speak openly, a fresh bit of injury and tyranny inflicted upon the Jewish people, only to scatter and disappear in all directions when the soldiery appeared on the scene. Throughout the city, and from one boundary of Judea to the other, low, unformed murmurings could be heard,—portentous and grimly expressive of the common hate of the people against the invaders and the wielders of law.

of a wondrous thing, even the moving of the army to Jerusalem, though why he should think it so wonderful I know not, since Pilate hath simply secured winter quarters."

A free laugh ran around the room at this because of the manner of telling, and the soldier continued:

"But I will tell of something that may be of surprising interest to ye all. Know then that Pilate hath commanded that Cæsar's effigies, which are upon the ensigns, be brought into the city. What of that? Such ignorance—such ignorance! Shame on ye all! Can ye not remember how the former procurators were wont to make their entry into Jerusalem with such ensigns as had not these ornaments? Why? The gods deliver us from such lack of knowledge! Are ye babes and sucklings that ye know not these things?"

"Thou art wondrous wise of a sudden," one of the men replied, mockingly, "but tell us of what thou dost talk that we may laugh with thee."

"Art thou making a jest of my words," was the angry reply, and he arose to his feet threateningly. "By my beard it will cost thee dearly, if thou art, for I——"

"Peace, peace!" a dozen voices cried out in concert; "go on with thy tale."

"Thou'rt a woman, and hath a woman's heart," growled the man who had offended him, "but let us

have thy news, and then if thou art disposed to make war, I will grant thee a meeting."

"Yea, and I will call upon thee to make good what thou hast said," was the response, but a cry arose that compelled him to instantly address himself to the assemblage.

"The Jewish law forbids the very making of images, and such an invasion by Pilate will occasion much revolt. The gray-bearded fools care naught for beauty of design, but cry out against even the image of Cæsar. The Jewish law," contemptuously, "the rant of a nation mad with religious fanaticisms! There is no law except the commands of Cæsar! What doth Rome care for the weak objections of such a people? Why, they know not their own desires, and only yester night I was——"

"Roughly handled because thou didst try to force thine advances upon a pretty Jewish maiden," interrupted the tormentor, and a laugh of derision rang out. "Myria, the beautiful, would have nothing to do with thee, thou scarred faced assassin, and thou art a fool to think to charm her with thy silly, clumsy love making."

"Now, by all the powers that be, thou shalt suffer for that," he cried, enraged beyond endurance by the taunt, and with the quickness of thought, drew his sword and sprang full upon the offender. But the action was met by a quick defence, and blade rang

upon blade before the startled company could grasp the situation.

Nothing is so dear to the Roman heart as a combat, whether in the arena or out, and with wild cries of delight the men assembled, gathered around the swordsmen, clearing a space that the weapons might have full play. The bright flash of steel and a masterly stroke brought forth, "For thy Myria, Pellus, strike like a Roman," only to be taken up from the other side of the cleared space by friends of the other combatant, "Sink thy sword in blood, Phrates, or we cast thee out of our hearts. Strike to the bone, and remember thou art the son of a warrior!"

And now, under the influence of such urgings, the men fought like demons, seeking only to inflict a mortal wound on the opponent, and at each stroke the outcry was redoubled. Only once did the onslaught cease, and that was when, by mutual consent, the men paused to divest themselves of an outer garment, the more readily to free the sword arm from all encumbrances, and directly the blood ran in torrents, and both were becoming exhausted, though still fighting with a dogged ferocity. A sudden stroke brought Pellus to his knees, and he was bleeding from a hundred wounds, yet he struggled to his feet and in a moment more the tide of victory had changed and Phrates was down. An instant more and he would have been finished, but a cry of alarm arrested

the weapon that was descending on his head. It was but a single word, and the effect was immediate.

“Cestus !”

The door of the room was thrown violently open, and a young man, clad in the uniform of a centurion, stepped quickly inside. He was apparently surprised, and as he viewed the scene, his face expressed a strong displeasure, and his form, manly and full of life and vigor, was drawn stiffly erect.

“What meaneth this wild disorder ?” he inquired, in tones of thunder, and the men quaked before the sound of his voice. “How is it I find here the play of swords ? Speak, what doth it mean ?”

“It was but a friendly combat, noble Cestus,” one of the soldiers ventured, “but a practice of art, and no harm hath been done.”

“Yea, in truth a friendly combat when one of thy comrades lies wounded unto death.” He glanced at the blood-stained floor, and his brow became darkened with rage. “What hath provoked this bloodshed ?” he demanded, and the soldier who had answered him at first stood forward as a spokesman for the company.

“The cause was but trifling,” he replied, “but when skill is challenged it becometh a matter of pride. Pellus made bold to jest at the expense of Phrates because of a clumsy attempt to seduce a maiden of Jerusalem, and——”

“Then the dog hath taken advantage of being a

soldier to obtain his desires? Have I not said death should surely follow such an act? I spake not in jest. Who is the Jewish maiden, that I may make what restitution as is possible?"

"One Myria, noble Cestus, a lowly maiden of the people, and not worthy of a serious thought from men of battle."

The centurion's face darkened, and his eyes blazed with a strange, angry light.

"Dost thou mean Myria, the daughter of Trypho?" he inquired in an ominous tone, and the soldier looked up in surprise, fearing he knew not what.

"Yea, the daughter of Trypho, the Jew," he replied. "Surely thou can'st not think her worthy of thy thought. She is beautiful, but there are many others."

"Beautiful! Thou speakest truly," Cestus returned, a soft light coming into his eyes that for an instant banished the anger,—but the relaxation was momentary, and a stern expression instantly suffused his face. "I have said that the maidens of Jerusalem shall not be molested." He straightened his form, and gave a signal of command, upon which the well-drilled soldiery formed into a compact mass. "Take thou Pellus to the prison, and see that Phrates is also confined until trial can be arranged. Away," imperiously, and without a word a detail of soldiers obeyed the command.

Cestus watched their departure in silence, but

when they were out of sight, he beckoned to a young man standing in the ranks, to approach.

“Thou art said to be of great truthfulness, and I have never doubted thy sincerity. I would have thee tell me without reserve, but in a low tone, the story of this trouble. Thou can’st do so without fear, for I absolve thee from wrong in witnessing this bloodshed.”

“I pray thee, noble Cestus, think not harshly of those who fought. Perhaps the remark of Pellus, though it did accuse Phrates terribly, was but a jest such as is oft’ passed without violence. To tell thee with candor, it hath been breathed about that Phrates did attempt to make fervent love to the maiden Myria, and——”

“With what measure of success?” came quickly from the centurion’s lips. “Hath he dared to say that she accepted him, or gave him even leave to speak to her again. I believe it not so, my friend; she could not stoop to such a game of infamy.”

His voice rang with such an intensity of feeling that the young man dared not look into his face for a moment. He saw that Cestus, for some reason, was much interested in the Jewish maiden, and he feared to give offence.

“Nay, not so—not so, noble Cestus,” he replied, “and for that same reason was this quarrel. It is said that Phrates met with great coldness and dis-

dain, and that the maiden threatened him should he trouble her again."

"And I shall carry out her threats, if he dares to approach her after this time," Cestus cried. "Hast thou heard whether he offered her insult?"

The young man hesitated and trembled. That Phrates had indeed insulted the maiden he strongly believed, but to make such an admission to Cestus would seal the doom of the prisoner. He, therefore, in mercy to his old comrade, and because he bore him no ill will, dissembled much against his own judgment, for he knew well how Cestus hated a lying tongue.

"One hears many things," he replied evasively, "and too much faith cannot be put in the common gossip of the day. If thou dost ask my opinion, noble Cestus, I would say that Phrates had no evil intentions towards Myria, and I would beg thy kind indulgence. A soldier cannot help being attracted by a pretty figure, and such eyes as those of Myria have ruined many hearts."

"True! true!" Cestus admitted, abstractedly. "Such eyes,—the like of which are not to be found in the world—nay, not even in Rome."

The young man studied his expression for a moment, and then a slight smile curled his lips.

"Phrates is a fool!" he said, in well simulated disdain. "He hath only been squandering priceless time, for a Jewish maiden cannot, under the laws of

the nation, marry a Roman, no matter how much she may love him. A pretty fool he was,—yea a pretty fool, indeed! Canst thou wonder that we laugh because of his stupidity.”

Cestus looked at him with such a fierce expression that the young man repented of his levity instantly, and shrank back appalled.

“Thou art a keen observer, my young friend,” the centurion replied, “but thy knowledge is at fault in this instance. The law of the land is that of Cæsar now, and who will dare say nay to Rome? But why speak so seriously on so light a subject?” His face brightened, and it was apparent that he wished to avoid further discussion. “I will ask thy opinion later,” he added in an undertone. Then aloud so as to be heard by the entire company. “Thank thee much for thy information. Go back to thy place, and I will speak of business better to a soldier’s taste.”

“And now attention!” he cried out in a strong, commanding voice, addressing the company that instantly, as one man, straightened up and looked towards him. “Certain plans of Pilate make it necessary for this company to be on duty to-night, ready for deadly work. In the market place at the midnight hour Pilate will cause to be brought the ensigns with the image of Cæsar thereon. It is expected that because of the prejudice amongst the Jews against such things, it will bring many from their homes, and there may be bloodshed. The company is to be in

The Court of Pilate

readiness to arrest and imprison any person found to be talking or acting seditiously. At the first signs of such sedition, swords are to be drawn and used without favor. Pilate hath caused this to be done in the night to prevent bloodshed, but is apprehensive of fatal results. Dost understand?"

The clang of a hundred swords, half drawn from their scabbard and thrust back again—the Roman acknowledgment of an order—answered him, and he raised his hand in signal of dismissal.

When the men had filed slowly out, and he was left alone, the centurion sank upon a seat, and remained buried in thought for some moments. He was keenly alive to the fact that Roman oppression had made the Jewish people desperate, and in his heart he could not blame them for complaining, and seizing every opportunity to engage the Roman soldiery. He was a Roman soldier, a centurion, and would do his whole duty to his country—such duty as he had been trained for from the earliest youth—but he found it hard at times to bear the sword against a people so clearly in the right, and so utterly without the power to throw off the yoke. His inclinations were at variance with his business as a centurion of Rome, and, though in his own country he found a great source of pride in his office, in Jerusalem the position appeared humiliating. The role of oppressor of the weak suited him not at all, though on the field of battle, where the sharp cries of victory rang around him, and the clash

of arms resounded in his ears, he had proved that he possessed no cowardly heart.

And now—fate, not being satisfied with thus filling his mind with disturbing sympathy for a helpless people, had caused a fresh trouble to assail him—even Myria, the beautiful Jewess, a creature as fair and radiant as the day, as full of mystifying coquetties, and dainty inconsistencies as the shades of night.

He studied long, and pictured her image in his mind, until he became almost crazed with a desire to see her, then with characteristic impulsiveness started to his feet determined to seek her company, only to fall back again to his seat, as the place he was in brought to his mind a realization of his business in life—duty to his country—implacable, stern and cold duty that had no place for sentiment.

Presently he arose to his feet again, once more the centurion, the military representative of a great world power, and with face set and brow contracted strode to the door, threw it open, almost angrily, and passed into the rapidly darkening night, intent only upon upholding the dignity of Rome,—for such is the power of training that it leaves little room for personal regard of circumstances, so far as a military life is concerned.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLACE OF THE MARKET.

SHORTLY before midnight Cestus again entered the company room and found the men in readiness. They were employed in careless pastime, but upon the Centurion's entrance every man sprang to his place, transformed in a moment from seekers after pleasure to stern men of war.

Cestus paused a moment at the entrance to inspect with carefulness every detail of their appearance, and his eyes reflected the pride that he felt in being at the head of such a company. He suddenly drew himself proudly erect, and his sword flashed through the air in salute.

"To the place of the market," he commanded, briefly, and like a vast machine, without word or question, the company formed in line before him and marched through the open door. Once on the street, a short word of command caused the men to quicken their pace, and in a few moments the steady tramp of feet, marching in unison, broke upon the still night air.

Pilate, the procurator, had thought to bring the conquering ensigns of Rome, with the images of Cæsar thereon, into the city of Jerusalem under the cover of darkness, and had commanded that no word of his intention should pass to the people. How this command had been obeyed was soon made clear to Cestus as he marched along the silent streets. Apparently the city was asleep, but his quick eye and alert ear soon detected hundreds of lurking, partly concealed figures, ever dodging into the shadows, but still visible to the watchful centurion.

As the company approached the market place, the streets began to be filled with a motley crowd of half-dressed men and women, all portentously silent and moving with stealthy tread, but with faces expressive of the most deadly hatred towards Rome. Cestus was not deceived by their silence, and knew that shortly he would be called upon to wield the sword, as he had many times in the past, in defence of the great power he served. He felt a strange reluctance pressing upon him,—a strong desire to side with the people, but this thought only served to bring a heightened color into his face, and he pressed resolutely forward.

The market place itself was crowded, and here all pretence was laid aside by the people, and an open hostility to the soldiery was displayed by the frenzied mass of humanity awaiting them. The company under Cestus forced its way with great difficulty through this mass to the center, using the flat of the

sword upon the bare heads that opposed them, and being jeered and hooted at every step. If Pilate had intended to spread the news of his intentions, he could not have taken a more thorough way, for it had passed from mouth to mouth with lightning-like rapidity, gaining in volume and virulence at every telling, until the very air was full of a vague rumor of trouble, and a great resentment had suddenly blazed forth, consuming in its fierceness all the wise counsel of the better heads, and ending in a swaying, surging mob in the market place, where men in tattered clothing, with gaunt figures and pale faces talked to each other in violent whispers, or shook their fists in impotent rage towards the compact line of soldiers that prevented an open outbreak. Flickering lamps and torches carried hither and thither, now throwing a dim, uncertain light upon a Jewish face, distorted with rage and hate, and again illuminating the stolid, immobile countenance of a Roman soldier, added to the grotesqueness of the scene, and the roar of thousands of voices raised in angry expostulation, bore a resemblance to the mad beating of the waves upon a rock-bound and impregnable shore.

At last, when Cestus felt his patience giving away, and thought it about time to throw his company into the midst of the crowd, a shout broke upon his ears, and he gave a sign to the men to prepare for action for the ensigns were approaching. At the sound, the

frenzy of the mob increased a hundred fold, and in blind, unreasoning fury they pressed close upon the company. Cestus did not give the command to strike, for he hoped for some diversion, and he reasoned well, for suddenly a trumpet call was heard, the steady trampling of feet resounded, and an aged Jew cried out lustily: "The ensigns—the ensigns! Down with the images of Cæsar!" The multitude took up the cry, and it swelled into an ocean of angry, turbulent sound. Some one, more bold than the rest, cried out loudly "See the Roman cowards, they are afraid of the people," and Cestus felt his temples flush for shame, yet he withheld the command to strike, so longed for by those under his command. And yet again an intrepid soul spat at the soldiery in derision. One sturdy veteran in the ranks looked at Cestus with an entreaty in his gaze, but the order to shed blood came not from his lips, and the soldiers looked on impatient and wondering at the unusual restraint.

Suddenly an increased rumbling was heard, the trumpets blew loudly and triumphantly and Cæsar's army was entering the market place, bearing the hated ensigns, and the anger of the populace arose to the point of desperation. All of their ancient prejudice against the making of images of any kind whatever, and the time honored observance of the law of Moses, swept over them, and forgetting Cestus and

his company, they turned to meet and oppose the newcomers.

It needs but a spark to ignite inflammable material, and before the soldiers carrying the ensigns were well aware of the intention of the people, an old man sprang upon the nearest bearer of the detested images and threw him to the ground, dragging the proud banner of Rome in the dust.

"Thou would'st dare to invade the city of our fathers with thy wickedness," he cried, loudly, "and thou shalt die the death of a dog."

His feeble arm reached out to grasp the cloth and tear it from its fastenings, but the next instant his skull was cloven through by the blade of the soldier who had regained his feet. His blood had hardly begun to flow, however, when a young man struggled through the midst of the crowd and leaped full upon the soldier.

"Thou son of an accursed race!" he cried, in a despairing tone; "see thou hast killed my father, and thy life shall pay the forfeit."

The flash of steel followed his words, and a gasping sound came from the soldier's lips as the sword fairly sank through his helmet and stretched him lifeless on the ground. Then the young man, seeing he had made an end of his enemy, and almost bereft of reason, turned and ran straight into the ranks of the soldiery, brandishing his dripping sword as he

moved, only to be received upon the sharp point of a javelin, which pierced him through the body.

The fall of the youth and the sight of his death agonies maddened the people already drunken with rage, and like wild animals, forgetting caution and fear, they plunged forward upon the compact ranks of soldiery.

And now the execution was deadly and terrible. The natural ferocity of the Roman soldiery, together with their hate of the Jewish race, caused them to welcome the combat and rejoice in the opportunity for cruelty. The command rang out from the lips of the centurions, "Death to the enemies of Cæsar," and the streets were soon slippery and running with blood. Men and women, boys and girls were alike put to the sword without regard to age and condition.

Cestus and his company had not taken part in the combat, having stood near the center of the market place, whither the fury of the onslaught had not reached, but the noise soon came to his ears, and without the loss of a moment's time, he brought his company forward on a run. The scene of carnage that met his eyes caused his cheeks to blanch, and his temples to flush for shame. A few words of explanation to those under his command was followed by the dashing of the company into the very midst of the fighting and slaughter. Slowly but surely the brave company of men worked their way between the people and the soldiers, seizing the most belligerent and

throwing them aside as though they were infants. Cestus fought his way to the front, and faced the troops hotly.

"Soldiers of Rome," he cried in a voice of wrath, "do ye forget your manhood thus to strike the innocent and helpless. I am put to shame because of your action. Cease this warfare instantly, in Pilate's name, or I turn against ye. Will ye fight your own brothers? That will ye be forced to do presently unless there be peace."

A murmur of indignation ran over the ranks, and a centurion, equal to Cestus in power, stepped boldly forth and faced him, with the look of unsatisfied vengeance still in his eyes.

"Mighty words of thine, Cestus!" he replied, insolently. "Have a care that we do not slay thee as a traitor to Cæsar. Dost thou command the armies of Rome? Look at these men! Are they to be daunted by thy fine words, thinkest thou? Nay, we deal not with traitors! Stand thou aside lest we smite thee."

"Traitor! Thou callest me a name that doth more closely fit thyself," Cestus replied, with a cutting scorn in his voice that made the other start. "Ah, thou dost think thy secret discovered, and so it is. I know thee, thou son of a murderer, and thou shalt answer for thy words with thy life. I seek no quarrel now, for more pressing business calls me, but I will attend thee sooner than thou thinkest. Away, and thank the business of the hour for thy life."

The man shrank back into the ranks as if whipped by the lash, and a young centurion stepped to the side of Cestus.

"The slaughter was due to heated passions, noble Cestus," he explained, "and my men are most sick of the carnage. We shall obey the command of Pilate through thy lips, but thou shalt cause to be arrested the most active amongst the Jews in this sedition, even that old man." He pointed to an aged Jew, struggling in the hands of two soldiers, who had caught him with uplifted sword.

"Thou canst not say that he took an active part," Cestus replied, incredulously, as the age of the captive bore not out the statement, "for he seemeth but the weakest of fighting men."

"True!" the centurion admitted, "but his looks deceive thee. He was not only active, but slew two of our best men before we could capture him."

"And his name?" Cestus asked, struck by an idea that he had seen the face before.

"He is called Trypho, and is much against Rome and Pilate. I know him to be the author of much sedition, and will so witness against him. Take good care that he escape thee not."

Cestus staggered back as though suddenly struck full in the face. The memory of where he had seen the face and under what circumstances came to his mind with overpowering distinctness. Myria's father, and a prisoner under the most deadly charge that

could be brought against a man in the court of Pilate—sedition! He realized in a moment how hopeless his case would be should he ever appear before that august personage, and knew that Pilate would grant no mercy under such a charge, could it be proven. And the proofs were sure; had not the young man signified his intention to witness against him. Cestus thought rapidly, and his face grew stern.

“How canst thou say that he slew the men?” he asked of the young man. “Did’st thou see him with thine own eyes? Attend well to thy words, friend, for it may mean the life of an innocent man.”

“Nay, I make no mistake, Cestus,” returned the other, “for I did witness his crime myself, and would have made an end of him if thou hadst not come opportunely. I shall bear true witness against him.”

“Did he not act only against those who would have slain him?”

“How now, noble Cestus!” cried the young man in great surprise, “wouldst thou release the dog because of thy tenderness of heart? We believe it not of thee.”

The centurion who had first approached Cestus cried across the intervening space between them.

“Not tenderness of heart, friend, but because he is a traitor to Rome.”

Cestus stood immediately erect, and pointed with a commanding gesture towards the captive.

“To the prison of Pilate,” broke forth from his

lips, in stern, unflinching tones, and in a moment the old man was bound hand and foot and carried away.

After the old man had disappeared, Cestus stood unmindful of the throng that surrounded him, and his blood ran cold and hot by turns. He cared little for the smiles of those who had witnessed his temporary weakness in favor of Trypho, and no other taunt would have moved him to cause the arrest than the accusation of being a traitor to Rome. That false accusation he could not stand, and to have done nothing with the captive under the circumstances would only have confirmed the lie so boldly uttered. Yet in his heart, despite his favor towards the prisoner on account of the beloved relationship, he could not deny that Trypho had acted against Pilate, and had taken a prominent part in the scenes of violence, and his duty was plain. He would go to Pilate on the morrow and ask for the prisoner's life, he told himself, and surely the procurator would grant him the boon. If not,—and the thought caused him to clench his teeth fiercely, grasp his sword's hilt and start towards the centurion who had thrown the charge in his face, only to come to his senses with a shudder and realize that he was in the midst of a mob, and that further bloodshed would surely follow unless he took prompt measure to suppress the anger of the populace. Instantly an order issued from his lips in stentorian tones.

“Men of Rome, form in solid ranks! Sheathe.

swords!" A noise of many hundreds of swords falling into their scabbards quickly followed. "Cross javelins!" and as the order was obeyed without a moment's loss of time: "March abreast against the people without bloodshed."

The order was instantly put into execution, and an understanding of the movement broke upon the mind of the people, acting like a soothing balm upon their feelings. The solid column of soldiers pressed against the front ranks of the crowd and drove them back step by step until presently an opening was made. One of the ensign bearers attempted to raise his banner, but Cestus grasped it out of his hand.

"Not now!" he exclaimed; "no further cause for madness must be given the people at this hour. Cæsar can wait. Forward, and peace in the name of Pilate."

A loud cheer broke from the people at this action, though there were those amongst the soldiery that grumbled loudly. Cestus' countenance gave no sign of pleasure or displeasure, and he marched steadily forward, scornful alike of favor and friendship when in the discharge of his duty; regardless of censure and adverse opinion when acting in the right.

The lapse of an hour found the market place deserted and no signs of the terrible combat that had taken place, except the dark stains upon the ground, the fragment of weapons scattered around, and here and there an article of clothing, torn and soiled almost

beyond recognition. The ghastly relics were everywhere in evidence, but the bodies of the slain had been removed by friends and relatives, and in many of the homes of Jerusalem that night, mothers wept over the remains of their loved one, or a father paced the floor grief stricken and unable to weep, but cursing the great Roman Empire bitterly and with terrible imprecations. The power of Cæsar's army, and the strength of his far-reaching arm had conquered Judea, but not all of his might was sufficient to crush the proud Jewish spirit.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF SORROW.

THE prison of Jerusalem, which was given the name of the reigning procurator, and was now called the Prison of Pilate, was a gloomy edifice situated near the palace and in the heart of the city. It was a structure of only one story, and appeared to be small, yet the great number of underground cells that had been delved out of the solid earth beneath it gave plenty of room for the numerous prisoners that were assigned to its care.

The place was a continual menace to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and was an example that could not be overlooked or forgotten, of the stringent Roman rule that held the country under subjection. Many were the prominent men, influential in public affairs, and highly respected amongst the Jews that were consigned there for trifling offences, and they only appeared again for execution, or were transported to Rome for service in the galleys, a fate to which death was preferable since there was no escape, and the strongest frame could not long endure

the slavish labor required by the hard masters that were placed over the captives.

The government of the prison was strict, and no prisoner had been known to leave it without permission since its foundation. Tales of cruelty were told in whispers—none dared to condemn publicly—but it was well known to the people that the most horrible forms of torture were used within its walls, and to be sent there was considered the worst punishment that could be visited upon an offender of the civil laws.

The morning after the combat in the market place had hardly dawned when Cestus made his way towards the prison. He found the place wrapped in gloom, and a strong guard of soldiery surrounding it, for Pilate was not content with an inner defence.

At his approach they saluted him as became his rank, and true to his military training, he returned their salutation, though his heart was heavy within him, and passed on to the room of the keeper without pausing. A knock on the door caused it to be opened, and Cestus quickly stepped inside.

“Of a truth thou art early with thy visits, friend Cestus,” the aged keeper exclaimed. “What interest hath our poor and melancholy place for thee? We have no fair women here for thine eyes to rest upon, nor can we offer thee other pleasures. To what, therefore, do we owe thy visit?”

“I came not for pleasure or out of curiosity,”

Cestus replied, impatiently. "Trypho, the Jew, was sent to thee last night suffering from many wounds. Hast you made him comfortable?"

"Comfort is an unknown thing with us, Cestus," responded the keeper, laughing because of the seeming absurdity of the idea, "and we deal not in it. No soft beds, say I, for those who sin against Rome. What, wouldst thou have us spend the wealth of Cæsar upon malefactors? Verily thou shouldst not have sent us so many."

"Many? Art thou then crowded with the poor wretches who were so unwise as to publicly rebel against Rome?"

"Yea, crowded is the word, Cestus. What with broken heads, twisted arms and crippled legs we have a goodly number as the crop of last night's work. Thy men are unwise, Cestus; why could they not have slain and rid us of the burden of keeping? It is cheaper to bury than to feed, and it is truly a waste to fill so many useless mouths."

"And yet they say that thou art merciful!" His voice betrayed a fine scorn that made the keeper tremble. "Of a truth I believe it—merciful to Rome. Is it not enough for thee that we slay in battle? But of Trypho; what sayest thou of him? In what part of the place hast thou confined him, and have his wounds been cared for?"

"Where else but in the common under cells with the rest?" the keeper growled, not a little displeased

because of the rebuke. "He is no better than the others, and as for his wounds, cannot the old man take care of himself? Wisdom surely comes with age."

"Dost thou mean to tell me that he hath been placed in the underground dungeons, where the earth worms creep, and the chill of death soon puts an end to a man's life?" Cestus asked, going close to the keeper and looking down upon him angrily.

The man cowed under his gaze, but nodded in the affirmative, and in a moment Cestus had seized him by the arms and shook him fiercely.

"Then see thou to it that he be better placed at once," he cried imperatively. "I charge thee with his comfort on thy life. Go, take him to a better place, and I will visit him there."

A low bow, full of cringing submission, answered him, but the keeper's averted face revealed his dislike of the order. He dared not disobey, however, and at once started to leave the room. He had only taken a few steps when a low knock came on the outer door, and he looked at Cestus for permission to open it. Cestus bowed his head, and turned away.

When the keeper had opened the door, a woman stepped inside. Her face was closely veiled, but her graceful bearing and the delicacy of her costume, though not of an expensive material, spoke of her beauty. The keeper, though hardened to scenes of

criminal suffering, felt abashed and ill at ease in her presence.

"What wouldst thou?" he inquired, gently, for such grace was not often seen in the gloomy prison.

"I came to see one who is imprisoned here," she replied in a voice full of gracious sweetness, tremulous and low.

"Hast thou an order from Pilate? Thou must know it is against the rules to allow visits otherwise."

"I thought it not necessary since the prisoner is so near and dear to me. Thou couldst not refuse to let me visit my father?"

"Then thou art——?"

"Myria, the daughter of Trypho," she replied, and the veil was suddenly thrown back, revealing a countenance of surpassing beauty, so perfect in its pure loveliness that the keeper was entranced. A tear-drop glistened on the long, flowing lashes, and her bosom heaved with an emotion that was the more violent because of having been long restrained. The keeper hesitated, undecided, but Cestus had heard the rich modulations of that voice,—had felt a nameless, uncertain and mad delight sweep over him when she had first entered the room, though he knew not who it was, and now that the face, long occupying the highest place in his heart was revealed, he went to meet her.

"Myria, thou here!" he exclaimed, and his eyes drank in the wondrous beauty of her form and face.

All the love in his heart had suddenly leaped to the surface and left him almost speechless.

She raised her eyes to his face, and for a moment a transfiguring light came into their beautiful depths, but almost instantly, like a dark cloud that comes over the bright face of the sun, it was succeeded by an expression wherein was only cold respect for his office, and a measure of resentful disdain.

"Where else should I be?" she replied. Then with an accusing glance: "I have heard of thy part in the arrest of my father, and it surpriseth me much that thou shouldst presume to address me. Why couldst thou not have spared my poor father; he could surely do no harm to Rome. It is shameful! Tell me, noble centurion, is it thy mission to persecute the weak and protect the strong, and wouldst thou take my father's life to glorify thine own office. It is a manly act, and thou shouldst be proud of thy strength."

Cestus stood transfixed with surprise, and all the happiness and light died slowly out of his face. The cup was hard to drain. He knew that she had spoken only the truth; he himself had caused the arrest to be made, but under what different circumstances than she could imagine! Yet, how could he explain when she thought him guilty of sacrificing her father to gain his own ends? His face set in hard, unbroken lines, and he struggled with his own desire to cry

out and tell her of his love,—of how he had suffered because of having had to arrest her father.

“It is my fate to be misjudged, Myria,” he said, “and I blame thee not. Thy father was accused of slaying two of the soldiers of Cæsar in the market place, and I had no voice in defence. I would have saved him for thy sake, if——”

“Nay, I pray thee say no more,” she cried quickly, misunderstanding his meaning; “not for my sake, but because it ill becomes thee as a strong man to use thy power against my father. Is it true, as they say, that thou didst hope to gain favor with Pilate by this act? I believed it not at the time of telling because I thought better of thee. Now, unbelief is changed into a certainty. Why couldst thou not be satisfied with thy present glory?”

He raised his hand in deprecation, and the look of pain and intense suppression on his face stopped her flow of words. His reserve was near to breaking through the mask that he strove to hold over his heart.

“Canst thou not see Myria, my love,” he whispered hoarsely, “that thou art torturing me! By the sacred Isis I swear to thee that I would have saved thy father if it had been possible, and even now, after having paid the last tribute of obedience to Cæsar, I would give my life to undo the work. Look well into my face, Myria, love, and tell me if thou canst see the stain of deceit there? I speak no

false words to thee! Command me in all things else, and I will be thy willing slave, even to the last drop of blood in my unworthy body. Bid me defy Pilate, and thou shalt see how willingly I go to my death because of thy sweet sake. Tell me, canst thou believe I would cause thee all this trouble for the sake of an office which I hold to be as naught compared with thy favor? Nay, nay, thou canst not do me this injustice. Forgive my unwilling part in this affair, and believe that I love thee, then will my happiness be complete, but condemn me again with thy voice or thy looks, and I hold my life worthless to Cæsar."

The beautiful head bent low, and a teardrop trickled down the fair cheeks. Cestus, mighty and impetuous in love as in war, caught the first glimmerings of forgiveness, and felt that he had reached her heart. Like a soldier pressing hard upon his first victory, he hesitated not, but imprisoned one of the soft, delicate hands in his own. At his touch, she wiped away the tear, and disclosed a face that alternated in grief and joy.

"Cestus," she whispered, softly, "I believe thee! Thou couldst not be guilty of such wrong." He drew her close to him with a caress, but she shrank away. "Nay, not at this time," she said; "I came to visit my father. Thou art in authority, and canst gain me admission. Wilt thou give such orders as will take me at once to his side?"

Cestus looked at the keeper, who had made no

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Cestus looked at the keeper, who had made no

move since Myria had entered, and who now shook his head vigorously, implying that admission could not be granted. Then did Cestus remember the vile place in which Trypho was held, and with a look ordered the keeper to proceed to carry out his instructions for removal.

"Thou shalt see him, Myria, love," he replied, "but not at this moment. The time shall not be long."

She stamped a pretty foot with all of a woman's perverseness.

"I understand thee not," she exclaimed, impatiently. "Thou dost speak of thy love, and in the same breath refuse a small request I make of thee. I command thee to take me to my father on the instant!"

He laughed gaily, with a lover's forbearance, and caught her in his arms, though she struggled to escape him.

"Thou art more powerful with me than all of Cæsar's commands," he replied, "and thou shalt be obeyed, but in this instance it is better that thou shouldst wait a little time. Wilt thou not trust me thus far, without an explanation?"

"My father—he is then badly wounded?" she cried, in terror. "Thou didst injure him in the capture?"

"Not so, my love—not so. Be patient and thou shalt see him in good time."

"Then, pray thee, why the delay?"

He reflected a moment before replying, but could think of no answer save the truth, and to tell her that her father had been kept in an underground cell during the night was not to his liking. She saw his hesitation, and her impatience increased.

"Why canst thou not take me to him now?" she repeated.

He felt that he could no longer conceal the truth.

"Thy father was confined in a place not fit for the meanest of dogs, and I but learned it this hour. The keeper hath gone to remove him to more comfortable quarters, and I cannot take thee to him until that be accomplished. It would expose thee to much impudence from the low creatures in the same place. Bear with me yet a little while, my love, and I promise thee a speedy meeting with thy father."

"Didst thou not accompany my father hither last night?" she asked, and her voice rang with a suspicion that made Cestus almost lose control of his temper. "Why didst thou allow such a thing to be done?"

"I saw him no more after he was arrested," he replied, "and he was taken away by some of the men of another company. I came to the prison this morning for no other purpose than to look after his comfort, and this is thy way of thanking me."

"But thou couldst have refused to allow his arrest," she persisted, and he strode the floor angrily.

"And such a refusal on my part would have meant

his instant death. An anger arose against me because of stopping the slaughter even when I did. Wouldst thou prefer his dead body or his living presence? But here comes the worthy keeper; perhaps now we shall be able to admit thee to his cell."

The keeper appeared in the door, but instead of advancing boldly, hesitated and beckoned to Cestus to approach. Myria, all impatience, started towards him, but he shook his head vigorously and motioned her back, indicating that he wished to speak to Cestus alone. Much surprised by the action, Cestus stepped to his side and saw with great alarm that his face was pale and his manner highly agitated. Myria noticed his strange perturbation, but thought that some affair of the prison house had become wrong, and that he was seeking the help of Cestus.

"What meaneth thy frantic looks?" Cestus inquired. "Doth it distract thy soul to give comfort to one of thy charges, and hast thou made the change? See, Myria awaits thy decision."

"It is of Trypho I would speak to thee, Cestus," returned the keeper in a whisper, casting pitying looks at Myria, who was restraining her impatience as well as she could, and to that end had walked to another part of the room.

"What of Trypho; hath he escaped thee?" Cestus asked, his face lighting with pleasure at the thought. "Surely thou art not sorry to lose one of thy bur-

dens. Come, speak out, man, and be not afraid. I would know the best or worst at once."

"In obedience to thy instructions, Cestus, I took myself to the cell of Trypho, and found him lying in a corner thereof, as I thought, in deep slumber. Knowing thy desire for haste, I shook him somewhat roughly by the shoulder and bade him arise and follow me. At last, after repeated urgings, he seemed to be awakening, and turned his eyes full upon me. 'Thy daughter awaits thee, Trypho,' I cried to claim his attention, but he answered not, and I shook him again only to have him slip through my arms to the floor of the cell. Then did I perceive that he had not known me, or heard my words, for his eyes were set in a stare that could only mean _____"

"Death!" Cestus whispered in an awe-struck voice, and the keeper nodded his head in the affirmative, while a shudder passed through the young man's frame.

He looked upon the beautiful creature standing in another part of the room awaiting the time when she could be taken to her father, and wondered how he could tear her heart asunder by announcing the cruel news; how he could be the bearer of such a message to her, when to spare her the pain and anguish he would give his own life gladly? And yet—and he drew a long, sorrowing breath—it must be done, he could not save her one pang of grief; her heart must

be broken. His experience as a centurion of Rome had taught him to face a situation squarely and to meet unafraid the most perilous trials of a soldier's life, yet this moment—this breaking of a direful news to the maiden he loved with all his heart, was the most trying; the most bitter task he had ever been obliged to fulfill.

A moment of indecision followed the keeper's announcement, then, with a firm setting of his lips, he strode towards her. She turned at his approach and smiled, and his heart failed him. He could only look into her face, and, with the quick instinct of a woman, she read enough of the truth to make her gasp in horror and seize his outstretched hand feverishly. The soldier felt himself powerless to tell her the truth, and, though brave on the field of battle, confessed his cowardice with his eyes.

"My father!" she cried in anguish; "tell me of him! Is he in danger? Take me to him on the instant, I pray thee. Thou canst not refuse my supplication. See, I beg of thee, delay not." She sank on her knees and caught at his clothing wildly. He raised her gently and tenderly, trying in his clumsy way to soothe her agitation, and raining kisses upon her lips, while she clung to him in an unnameable fright and terror.

"I would have saved thee, love," he whispered, "but I could do nothing. A life-time's devotion can only repay thee for this cruelty, and I consecrate my-

self to thy service entirely. Look up and be comforted, my sweet, thy father is out of pain."

The keeper, supposing that Cestus had told Myria of her father's death, approached the two as they stood in each other's embrace.

"The body, Cestus," he said; "what disposition wouldst thou order?"

Myria heard and comprehended for the first time the awful truth, and like a flash of blinding light the blow struck her senseless in Cestus' arms. He felt her form relax, saw her face lose its color, and without a word carried her gently across the room where he gently laid her down. Then a mighty, unreasoning anger against the blundering keeper struck to his heart, and with a fierce cry he wrenched his sword from its scabbard and wheeled around. But the keeper, wise in years, had disappeared, and replacing his sword after a moment of wrath, the young man sank by the side of the beloved form and stroked her hands and face in a vain endeavor to revive her. Finding himself unsuccessful at last, and there being no one in the room to render assistance, he picked her up in his arms and strode through the outer door into the street, and in this manner carried her to her home, amid the jeers of the soldiery who witnessed the act.

CHAPTER IV.

MALCHUS.

CESTUS went on his way with the unconscious figure in his arms not aware of the presence of an enemy, but the instant he had passed out of sight, a man, low in stature and treacherous of countenance, with strongly marked Jewish features, hurried to the keeper's entrance and knocked impatiently. The aged custodian had returned to the room and hastened to open the door for him. The man stepped hastily inside as if wishing to avoid observation, and glanced nervously around the room in search of possible visitors. Seeing that he was alone with the keeper, he lost no time in greetings, but at once spoke his mind.

"Cestus hath just left the prison with Myria in his arms," he said, and his voice was full of bitterness; "for what reason did he make bold to carry her in that manner?"

The keeper regarded him coldly, and looked him over carefully before replying.

"Couldst thou not see that she had fainted?" he replied at length with a laugh of sarcasm that was

lost on the other. "Dost think that Cestus is overfond of burdens, even though feminine?"

"Let thy tongue be civil, or I forget thine age," retorted the man, angrily. "I would ask of thee the cause of her faintness? Myria would object to such conveyance were she aware of the manner thereof. Tell me the truth, why did the maiden lose herself thus?"

"And now I perceive who thou art," the keeper replied, smiling as if the revelation had amused him immensely, and the face of the man grew dark with ill-concealed anger. "Thy name is Malchus, the servant of the high priest. Ah! the word 'servant' doth not please thee, I perceive. Shall we say thou art the confidential adviser of the mighty, then, since it suits thee better? Well, truly, I care not for thy title or calling, if thou be an honest man." He turned aside to hide a smile of derision. "But of Myria, whom they say thou dost greatly admire—wouldst thou not be out of thyself if the news was suddenly brought to thee that the one dearest to thy heart had died?"

"Then Trypho, her faher, is dead; it can be no one else. Tell me the truth, man, I implore thee?"

"I do not observe thy grief, friend," mockingly. "Perchance the news suits thee too well, and I would not raise thy hopes so high. What difference can it make to thee whether he be dead or alive? If thou wilt be of like candor, I may tell thee——"

"I hide it not from thee that I bear Trypho no good will," cried Malchus, his face aglow with vindictive passion. "Hath he not despised me and poisoned Myria's mind against my suit? Why conceal the truth from thee since thou dost already know? Thou canst not preach goodness; it would not become thy vocation. Speak, therefore, and plainly."

"Thou art right," the old man responded, "I will speak. Trypho was dead, but is now alive. Yea, I tell the simple truth," as Malchus raised his hand incredulously; "he that was dead is alive again. When Cestus was with the maiden I left the room, fearing for my life because of having spoken too suddenly, and knowing his temper. My footsteps led me to the cell of Trypho, and I found the old man had recovered his breath, though very uncertain, and with scarce strength enough to live. I bethought myself of some strong wine stored away, and made haste to pour some of it down his throat. He is alive, but that is all that can be said. Why didst thou wish him dead?"

"Did I not tell thee that he opposed my suit." Malchus leaned over the keeper and whispered, his voice sounding like the hiss of a serpent: "None can say of the manner of his death, or that thou didst find him still alive?"

The keeper shrank back appalled at the suggestion, and his face became drawn and cold.

"Wouldst thou murder the old man?" he asked,

lowering his voice as Malchus had done. "It is true that no one can say as to the manner of his death, but Cestus will know that he is alive when he returns for the body."

"Unless he should by accident die in the meantime," Malchus replied, ominously, a murderous passion distorting his face into the semblance of a beast. "Why shouldst thy wine be of so pure a character? Wilt thou grant me permission to administer the strengthening beverage?"

"I understand thee well, Malchus, thou fiend of darkness; thou wouldst poison a man helpless in his age and already wounded unto death. Nay, I cannot consent to thy proposition. Understand me well, I claim not righteousness, that is thy peculiar deception with the people, but I slay no helpless men."

"Yea, I also understand thee," Malchus replied, and he bent forward to impress his words upon the keeper. "I know right well how thou didst obtain the office thou dost hold. Ah!" as the keeper trembled visibly under a strong fear that had seized him, "I see that doth touch thee. Thou hast not lived without blood, and——"

"Cease thy words," the keeper begged, strongly agitated, and glancing about as if fearful of being overheard. "I have long suspected that thou didst know too much. Peace I say between thou and I, at any cost. Ask what ye will but this murder, and I grant it."

"Then peace let it be, but take thou good care that our purposes cross not. I tell thee Trypho stands well in my way, and thou hast only to withhold thy care for a time to serve me. Thy scruples are strange when the wine offers an easy remedy, and would relieve thee of much trouble. Think of how much Cestus hath always been against thee in matters political. Is he thy friend? Nay, but thy bitterest enemy."

"But the death of Trypho—how will that cause Cestus trouble?"

"Stupid are thy wits, friend keeper. Hath it not occurred to thee that Myria blames Cestus for the arrest of her father, and if he die in prison, will she not cast him out of her heart? Then will also Trypho be silent in death, giving me much opportunity to gain Myria. What is it to thee how the maiden is gained? Thou art of too many years to understand the feeling of love, and know not what manner of things I would do to gain the maiden's favor. Think ye I will give her up to Cestus without the shedding of blood?"

"And I tell thee, Malchus, that Cestus is a brave man and will not withhold his arm against thee if thou dost cross him with the maiden. I have known of thee for many months, but have not known thee in person, yet when I look at thee and compare thy strength with that of Cestus, I cannot fail to predict thy failure. What maiden could look upon thy suit

with favor when Cestus opposes thee." He laughed in a cynical manner, and Malchus frowned with displeasure. "Yet because we are alike in crime, I wish thee success, my good Malchus, not that I think myself thine equal, because I profess not righteousness. Thou'rt a cunning rogue?"

"Thy bantering doth not anger me," Malchus replied; "it is but the raving of a fool. Wilt thou permit me to administer the comforting cup to Trypho?"

"Nay, by my soul, I will not! I have no desire to assist in the murder."

"Thou art bold in thy denials," Malchus cried, angrily, "when I hold thy fate in my hands, and could, by a word to Pilate of thy crimes, encompass thy death."

"And thine own at the same time, my Malchus, for would I not speak of thy good deeds, and would they be much to thy credit?"

A crafty smile passed instantly over the young man's face, and his manner changed to softness, but there was a treacherous light in his eyes.

"True!" he admitted, "thou couldst cause me much trouble, and I desire no quarrel with thee. Rather should we be friendly and of a good nature towards each other. I will say no more of the wine, but canst thou allow me to see Trypho? It may be that he hath become conscious, and I would be the first to offer him assistance. Thou canst understand with what appreciation Myria would receive the

news of my offer, and how the cause of Cestus would suffer thereby."

"If thou art in possession of an order from Pilate, I can admit thee. The rules of the prison are strict."

"Thou canst set aside thy rules for this time. Favor me in this and I will repay thee by such influence as can be brought to bear at court."

The keeper was silent for a few moments, and thought rapidly. Malchus knew too much about his previous life to make an enemy of, and there could be no great harm in admitting him to Trypho's cell, even though he had no order from Pilate. Yet he reflected that if it should come to the ears of Cestus, there might be some unpleasantness, and a centurion of Pilate's guards, with authority to enter the prison at any time, was more to be feared than Malchus, however much he knew of incriminating acts. If he could induce Malchus to leave at once, after having seen Trypho, and Cestus should not happen to return before he had done so, all would be well, and he could serve them both, thereby gaining favor on either side.

Malchus was watching his face with an evil smile of triumph on his own countenance, and presently the keeper, without speaking, motioned him to follow and moved towards the door opening into the cell house. In a few moments they had stopped before a door, heavily bound with iron, and opening apparently into the solid earth. The keeper had led

Malchus down a flight of stairs to reach the place, and taking a large key out of his pocket, he threw open the door, whereupon a draft of unwholesome, foul air rushed forth, nearly stifling the Jew as he bent eagerly forward and peered into the dense darkness of the interior. He shuddered involuntarily, but followed the keeper through the low entrance, scarcely large enough to admit a man standing upright, and as he did so a drop of moisture fell upon his bare head from the reeking ceiling, causing him to utter an oath and walk more cautiously into the awful place.

The keeper walked to a corner of the cell, and knelt beside a figure that lay outstretched upon the damp, earthy floor. Malchus following him closely, also bent over the inanimate form, and saw that there was no response to the urgent calls made by the aged guardian.

"Is the man dead?" he asked with eager breath, and a look of malicious pleasure shone in his eyes.

"I know not," the keeper replied, renewing his urgings, but without visible results. "He was alive but an hour since, though the spark of life was flickering and uncertain. See thou the glare in the eyes." He held the torch he carried close to the gaunt face of the prisoner, and Malchus bent still closer to satisfy himself.

"Yea, but it is not the stare of death," he exclaimed petulantly, "nor even the flush of dying."

He examined the old man's wounds carefully, and suddenly looked up into the keeper's face with an insinuating smile. "I find that he is badly hurt about the heart," he continued, "and may die from the effects of a sword thrust. If thou wilt bring some of the wine thou didst speak of, I will in thine absence bind up the wound. His life may yet be saved."

The keeper gazed at him in a puzzled manner, unable to decipher his softening tones.

"And leave thee alone with him?" he said at last, a smile of comprehension crossing his face. "Nay, friend Malchus, I perceive thy purpose. Thou wouldst put an end to his life and claim not the deed, laying the blame therefor on Cestus or his men. I tell thee thou shalt not do this thing."

A malignant light blazed out of the dark eyes of the Jew, but he concealed his chagrin under the guise of mirth.

"Thou art inclined to jest," he replied lightly, "and none but an evil heart like thine would have conceived such a deed. I thought not of it. If thou art afraid to leave me alone with him, then if thou wilt inform me of the place where the wine is stored, I will bring it to thee that thou mayest revive him."

"Of a truth thou art of a changeable nature," the keeper said, "and I much suspect thy purpose. How is it that thou dost now desire to save his life?"

"For Myria's sake," he returned. "Canst thou not see what favor it would bring from the maiden.

Why shouldst thou ask my reason, since I show thee my desire to help Trypho. If thou art favorable to that purpose, thou wilt tell me at once where to find the wine. Wouldst thou kill him with delay?"

The keeper studied the face of the Jew, in the flickering and unsatisfactory light, to find the meaning of his sudden willingness, but after a moment's scrutiny found nothing suspicious in his looks.

"As thou wilt," he replied, and gave him directions where to find the strengthening cordial—directions so minute and careful as to leave no excuse for Malchus to blunder into other parts of the prison house.

The young man crept out of the cell, and returned in a short time with the desired flask, which he at once handed to the keeper, who took off the fastenings and bent over the figure to force some of the liquor down the throat. He was in the very act of allowing the fluid to flow into Trypho's mouth, when he glanced upwards and saw Malchus bending over him with a peculiar look in his eyes—a look that spoke of shrewd triumph and delight—the look of a fiend intent upon the murder of an enemy. The keeper allowed the flask to recede from Trypho's mouth and placed it on the floor, struck to the point of hesitation by a sudden suspicion that had entered his mind. He slowly arose to his feet and faced Malchus, holding the torch so that he could see the workings of the

young man's countenance, and a smile of satisfaction and confirmation crept into his eyes.

"I had forgotten the custom of the day," he said with terrible distinctness and deadly meaning, "that doth require the offering of the cup first to the guest, for which I crave thy pardon. If thou wilt but excuse the slip of memory in an old man, I shall most willingly right the wrong." He poured out a draught of the rich, red wine in a cup he found in the cell, and cermoniously offered it to Malchus. "It will warm thy heart and put thee in better mood," he continued mockingly, "for the vintage is old and of great strength. Drink thou, and I will next administer to Trypho."

"I do not take wine," Malchus replied, his face growing deadly white, "neither do I think it well to delay thy treatment of the wounded. Proceed thou, or he die by thy hands."

"Nay, I think him not in so great danger, and I would not care to wound thy feelings by offering the wine first to another. Drink thou, therefore, and delay not."

Malchus answered by dashing the cup from his hands, and the wine sank into the earthy floor of the cell.

"Thou art intent upon provoking me to violence," he cried, enraged. "Look well to thyself, or I visit my vengeance upon thee. Thou canst not afford to make an enemy of me."

“Nor thou of me; nor I of Cestus,” the keeper replied. “Thou didst think to make me guilty of giving Trypho the poisoned wine that thou hadst prepared. Thou art too clumsy with thy countenance, friend Malchus, for it did reveal thy evil intents.”

The Jew started violently, but seeing that his purpose had been discovered, cried angrily:

“And what dost thou intend to do with Trypho, then?”

“To keep him from death, if it be in my power, and to so inform Cestus. It is better for me to obtain his favor than thine. What sentence is passed upon Trypho, I know not, but his life will mightily please Cestus, and that end I mean to attain. As to thy threats, what care I for them, since I hold a weapon against thee greater than thine own against me. Not that I care to make an enemy of thee, Malchus,” he added, for despite his apparent contempt for the man he was afraid of his influence, and Malchus instinctively felt it.

“So be it, then,” he answered doggedly. “Thou shalt save Trypho’s life, and see what Cestus can do for thee.”

His voice fell in submission, and the keeper started towards the door of the cell, expecting Malchus to follow him, but the moment his back was turned a cry of fury broke from the Jew’s lips, and, startled by the sound, the keeper wheeled around in time to see Malchus spring towards the prostrate

body of Trypho with a gleaming knife in his hand. The glistening blade swung high in the air, and before the keeper could interfere, the cowardly blow had been struck, and the sharp-pointed weapon had found a lodgement in Trypho's breast.

The keeper, wild with rage, threw himself upon Malchus and, catching him by the throat, pushed him back until the door of the cell had been reached, then thrust him forcibly through. He uttered not a word, and Malchus, as though satisfied with his deadly work, struggled only to release himself from the tenacious hold upon his throat. In the corridor of the cells the keeper motioned Malchus to move ahead of him, and the order was obeyed. When the keeper's room was reached, however, Malchus opened his lips.

"It will be well for thee to hold thy tongue concerning this thing," he said, "or it may be unpleasant. It shall be supposed that Trypho died of wounds received last night. Dost understand?"

"Yea, I understand thee well, and I tell thee thou art a murderer of the blackest type, and thou art cunning enough to know I cannot inform of thine act because of having admitted thee without an order. Leave me; I wish nothing else to do with thee."

Malchus laughed outright—a laugh wherein there was so much of evil that the keeper, though hardened to sin, shrank back as if a scorpion had stung him.

"I had not thought of that restriction on thy

tongue," the young Jew said, "but it is well that thou hast mentioned it. When Cestus calls thou canst assume a virtuous sorrow and tell him how much it hath grieved thy tender heart to have Trypho die on thy hands, but if thou dost dare to accuse me, either to Cestus or hint darkly to Myria, the same wound that ended Trypho's life is waiting for thee."

He waived a menacing farewell and strode through the outer door, and the keeper sank down exhausted, only to struggle to his feet a few moments later and again seek the cell of Trypho.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAW OF MOSES.

CESTUS reached Myria's home, near the Gate of the Valley of Jehosaphat, only too quickly, for the precious burden he carried, the slight, girlish form so fair and delicate, was not easy to relinquish, and the weight he felt not at all. Neither did he mind the curious and amused glances that greeted him, for there was in his heart both sorrow and joy; sorrow that he had brought this trouble upon her, though most unwillingly, and joy because he held her so near him. What others thought of his act in thus carrying her through the streets he did not stop to consider, and only breathed a sigh of regret that the journey was not longer. Several times on the way he felt a slight tremor pass through her form, and the thought once struck him with delicious suddenness that perhaps she had recovered consciousness, and would not let it be known for fear of being put down. This thought he dismissed, however, on the instant as being unworthy, and hurried onward to her house, so that she could receive the proper attention. Manlike, he had not thought of stopping at some

house on the way and calling on the women to revive her, but in his ignorance of such matters, did the next best thing by taking her directly home, where she could receive the necessary attention.

Myria's mother saw the strange figure of a Roman centurion with a maiden in his arms approaching, and, wondering mightily thereat, went forth out of the house to see what it all meant. When she perceived that it was Myria who was being carried with such tender care her heart failed, and she screamed, after the manner of excitable women, burdening Cestus with useless and unreasonable questions, which he did not answer, but carried Myria quickly into the house.

"And now," he said, after she had been laid on a couch that had been hastily prepared, "I will tell anything thou wouldst know. But first, thou shouldst attend to thy daughter's wants. It is, of course, but a fainting spell, and she will presently recover. There is no reason for alarm on her account."

"Where didst thou find her, and how doth it happen that thou, a Roman, should defile a Jewish maiden by carrying her in thine arms?" she demanded indignantly.

He shrank back before her gaze, and his eyes blazed with a dangerous light.

"I know it to be thy superstition," he replied; "yea, superstition," as her eyes met his angrily, "that the touch of a Gentile doth defile a maiden of

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Israel, but wouldst thou intrude such an objection at this time? Doth not need in any form call for assistance, whether from a Jew or a Roman? Consider, wouldst thou have had me leave her unconscious and without friends to find her way home as best she could simply because thy people would not approve of mine act? Nay, I believe it not of thee; thou couldst not be the mother of such a gentle creature and think so."

She held out her hand to him impulsively.

"I crave thy pardon," she said humbly; "I forget thy service, but she shall thank thee herself. I know thee well, noble Cestus; thou art much above those of Rome who oppress the people."

Cestus, without replying, bent over Myria, and saw with great pleasure that she was slowly regaining her senses. A few moments passed in anxious silence, then the eyelids fluttered open, a deep-drawn breath agitated her bosom, and she sat upright, gazing around with wondering eyes. Cestus claimed her attention by placing his arm around her in support, and the act brought back to her mind all the harrowing details of the morning, and the tears began to flow in silence.

"Myria, love," he whispered, "be comforted with the thought that thy father is happy, and that thou hast still a mother to love thee. Think of those who now claim thy affections—yea, thy deepest love. Thou art rich in the possession of hearts."

The fair head drooped still lower, and the torrent of bitter grief raging within her shook her body in its grasp as if it would tear the frail boundary asunder. Cestus watched her, and in spite of his efforts the eyes that were so feared by those under his command became moist. He held her closely in his arms, and tried in his manly way to comfort her, but she would not listen to his words, and presently, alarmed by her silence, he laid her gently on the couch and walked into an adjoining room where the mother had gone to prepare a soothing draught.

She greeted him with a serious expression on her face, and read in his eyes that the news he carried was unpleasant. He had not told her of Trypho's death, and again his heart failed him, and he knew not how to begin the direful tidings.

"I would ask thee to go to Myria's side," he said awkwardly and in a constrained manner, "for she needs thy assistance. I cannot comfort her."

"Tell me the nature of thy news, Cestus," she replied, walking to his side and looking into his face. "Why dost thou conceal such things from me as are known to Myria? Truly, I know it concerns my husband, Trypho, and I am ready to hear the worst. Dost thou come to tell me that Pilate hath passed swift judgment upon him, and hath set the time for his death? It would surprise me not, for I know the Roman idea of justice. But my people will demand his release, and Pilate cannot refuse without

danger. Thou shouldst not look so downcast and sorrowful. His imprisonment will be of brief duration. Speak, Cestus; tell me what hath caused Myria's grief!"

Cestus bowed his head low, and his heart was heavy within him. Was it not enough that he should have to bring the sorrow to Myria's heart without being the bearer of such evil news to her mother?

"It is of Trypho that I would tell thee," he said presently. "Thou dost know how he was confined but last night, and thou canst not doubt but that I visited the prison house this morning to inquire about his well being. Instead of finding him well, I——"

"Is he then so badly wounded?" she interrupted quickly, her face becoming very pale and drawn, "and dost thou think him to be in a dangerous condition?"

"He was badly wounded," he replied softly, but his voice sounded harsh and unnatural to his own ears. "It is worse than I have said. He is in no danger from human hands. Pilate can do him no harm now."

"Then how dost thou say it is worse than thou hast said?" she began, not comprehending the import of his words, but Cestus saw her face grow suddenly white, and, as the meaning broke upon her mind, a low gasp escaped her and she fell into his arms. He held her for a moment, and reproached himself bitterly for his suddenness in telling her, though how

he could have avoided it he could not see. Then, remembering the necessity for immediate action, he raised his voice and called to the servants of the household.

Myria heard the call, and the weakness left her body on the instant. Her intense love for her mother made her forget her own grief in the desire to comfort her, and, to the utter surprise of Cestus, she appeared in the doorway and lost no time in relieving him of his burden. He stood about the room, helpless and in the way, as a man will always be in such cases, until Myria directed him in a low voice to bring certain lotions, which he did cheerfully and proud to be of service, not remembering that a centurion of Rome should obey only the commands of his superior officer.

When, however, the mother had been restored to consciousness and was dumb in her great grief, he bethought himself that his presence in this house of sorrow was an intrusion, and approached Myria to tender his farewell. She received his speech very coldly, and he felt his heart grow heavy within him.

"I understand thee not, Myria, love," he expostulated, with a lover's impatience and sensitiveness. "Dost thou bid me go without a tender word from thee? Wouldst thou have me bear hence a remembrance of indifference on thy part?"

"Thou art of Rome," she answered proudly, "and I of Israel. Can there be between the eagle and the

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dove anything but enmity; anything between the lion and the lamb but hatred?" All the injustice to her people from the soldiers of Cæsar rose up in her mind, generating a great anger and resentment, and her eyes flashed like fire. A century of cruelty had crushed the Jewish nation, but had not extinguished the proud spirit of the people, and she felt it all. "How canst thou speak to me of love," she demanded indignantly, "when thou art in the service of a tyrant who spares not innocent lives? Hast thou no shame, and dost thou think that I can forget the wrongs of the Roman arms?"

"I blame thee not for remembering," he answered, wounded in spite of himself by her hot words, "but why shouldst thou censure me for things I cannot help?" The proud Roman spirit was rising within him, but he strove to control it and to reason calmly, giving her accusations the proper weight and consideration. He knew she spoke truly, for had he not felt a great indignation himself because of some of the acts of Rome? Yet, how could he, a centurion, make such an admission? He stood in silence, unable to deny her words, and she, with quick intuition, noted his hesitation.

"Thou and I are enemies, noble Cestus," she exclaimed, "but if it will ease thy mind to know that I think thee honest and far above thy fellow countrymen, be assured of that fact. Yet, because thou art of Rome and I of Israel, there can be no friendship



between us." Her face was strangely drawn, and her bosom palpitated as she spoke, and there was a suspicious twitching of her lips, but she went bravely on, sparing herself nothing. "Thou shouldst forget that we have ever met, and seek one of thine own countrywomen. Her thou canst love without dishonor, and I will remember thee no more forever."

He strode fiercely to her side and caught her hand in his grasp, pressing it so closely that she was near to crying out with pain.

"And thou dost think that I will be satisfied with this?" he cried. "Nay! What care I for the opinion of the people? Thou art of Israel, sayest thou? Pray, and what can this mean to me? Thy people are rich in foolish traditions, and thou canst not think to hold to all of them. Wouldst thou let such foolish things stand between us, when my very soul desires thee, and I think thee not indifferent." His burning gaze sought her face, and he continued impetuously, but very unwisely: "The priests of thy people teach nothing but sedition against Rome; they have lost sight of religion. Why shouldst thou follow such teaching? Is not thine own heart a surer guide for thee, and what greater religion is there than love?"

"I am of Israel," she repeated with heightened color, "and believe in the Law of Moses. Thou shalt not say anything against the priests in my presence. They are righteous men, and cannot be understood

by the Gentile mind. Go thy way, Cestus, and take with thee my gratitude for such service as thou hast done."

He detected her meaning instantly; she still believed him guilty of having caused her father's death. Then there swept over him an anger that he could not control, and, without a word, he strode out of the house.

And when he was gone she sank on the floor and great sobs came from her lips. Once she stretched forth her hands as if to call him back, but, overcoming the longing by a strong exercise of will power, she turned away to comfort her mother, finding therein a measure of relief for her own mind.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMPANY ROOM.

CESTUS made his way along the streets, and his mind was filled with anger towards himself, Myria and the world in general. There has never been a time when love could reason, because it so completely blots out every other consideration, and his thoughts were bitter and full of sadness. He cared nothing for what might be thought of him by the people, but to have Myria so coldly declare him ineligible to her affections was enough to put him in a tempest of rage and despair.

A short distance from Myria's house he was made suddenly aware that a Jew had stopped in his path and stood coolly confronting him, with a sneering look on his face. It was Malchus, who had just come from the prison and was on his way to Myria's house. Cestus knew him only slightly, but he had heard enough of his character to desire none of his company, and would have brushed him out of the way and passed on, indifferent to his existence, had not Malchus, unable to restrain the venom of his tongue, addressed him.

"I perceive that thou art in a great hurry, friend," he said insolently; "art thou looking for another maiden of Israel to carry through the streets in so grand a manner?"

Cestus looked him over contemptuously, and measured his height with cynical eyes before replying. His blood arose hotly because of the insulting attitude of the Jew, but he restrained himself by thinking of the words of Myria and remembering that to chastise him would only bring additional condemnation from her.

"And pray how doth that concern thee?" he replied. "Is it thy business to watch the actions of others? Such a course is like to bring thee into trouble."

"Fine words from thee," Malchus retorted bravely, though secretly quaking for fear of personal violence. "Is it not my business when thou dost presume to defile a maiden of Israel by thy touch? It hath been said of thee that thou wouldst use thy power to gain thy desires, and that thou dost not consider virtue to be in existence. Dost think, therefore, that I will stand idly by and see thee carry out thy wishes? Myria is not for thee, and——"

The name wrought a wonderful change in Cestus' face, and the storm of anger that arose almost overpowered him.

"Stay!" he commanded imperiously. Then with terrible emphasis, as Malchus shrank away from

him: "If thou dost bring her pure name in such conversation I will strike thee dead at my feet. I care not for thy thoughts, neither art thou an equal that I can meet in honorable combat. Thou art presumptuous because Pilate doth fear thy people and would give them no opportunity for open and general complaint to Cæsar, but I tell thee if thou dost breathe one word against Myria thou diest. Leave me, or I forget myself."

"I am not a match for thee in physical strength," Malchus replied, retreating before his gaze, and slinging back the words with the hiss of a serpent, "but thou shalt see how it fares with thee hereafter. Take thou good care how thou dost approach Myria with thy Roman promises that are so easily broken."

Cestus felt his hand involuntarily moving towards the hilt of his sword, and in a moment the weapon was shining in the bright sun, but he suddenly remembered himself, and stifling his anger as best he could, walked rapidly away, going straight to the company room in the palace of Pilate.

Here a strange scene greeted his eye. The room was filled with soldiers engaged in various occupations. Some were busily shining their swords, a pastime dear to the heart of a soldier; others were playing games of chance and quarreling among themselves over the outcome like noisy children, while many were gathered in groups, drinking and singing gaily, for the soldier of Rome is a lover of pleasure

when not on duty, though stern enough and valiant enough when on the field.

Cestus' appearance in the doorway was the signal for the cessation of all diversion. Cups that had been filled with rich wine were hastily hidden, and the confusion of shame seemed to have seized upon them all because of having been surprised in such trivial things by their beloved, though exacting and stern, commander.

As he looked over the scene his face clouded with disapproval for an instant, then, with quick divination, saw that their laxity of discipline was nothing but the natural desire for amusement, and with a wave of his hand set them all at ease, smiling as the look of conscious embarrassment passed away from them.

"A soldier fights none the less valiantly," he said, "because of enjoying his leisure, and Cæsar cannot doubt the bravery of this noble company. The time for work hath not yet come, so pleasure is king."

A great, lumbering fellow in another part of the room heard the words, and raised his voice in a shout of approval, and instantly a mighty cheer greeted the young centurion. Cestus smiled at the rough loyalty shown by the men and raised his hand in salute, beckoning at the same time for one of the younger men to approach him.

"Thou art the man who explained to me the trouble between Pellus and Phrates of yesterday," he

said, "and canst tell me further about them. Were they imprisoned?"

"Thine orders were to that end, noble Cestus," the youth responded, "and it hath been done."

"Then thou shalt send and release them both, and say to Phrates that I would hold converse with him at once, if his wounds will bear. Take this order with thee," handing him the paper, "so that thy mission will not be doubted."

"It is an act worthy of thee," the young man replied, "and I go right gladly. Thou'rt a just man, and we honor thee for it."

He waved the paper over his head and shouted the news to the men, who reciprocated by cheering right heartily, and Cestus felt justly proud of the company.

The young man started off to execute his mission, but Cestus called him back.

"A word before thou dost go," he said. "I know that thou art well versed in Jewish law, because thou hast lived in Jerusalem many years. Tell me, what meaneth this strange thing that they say forbids the marriage of a maiden of Israel to one of another faith? Can such a law apply to a man of Rome? Explain this to me, for I truly cannot understand it."

"It is but one of the many foolish traditions and laws of the Jews," the young man replied. "A Jewish maiden may not wed a Gentile, by which name is known a citizen of any other country save this; there-

fore, thou art a Gentile, and, according to their teachings, without a god, for they do not recognize the sacred Isis or any other of our deities. They are of narrow mind," scornfully, "and selfish in themselves. Do not their high priests rebel against Cæsar, thinking only of dead laws and observances?"

"But is there not some way to set aside the marriage law?" Cestus inquired earnestly. "It is unjust and unreasonable. Suppose a Roman loved a Jewish maid, could he not obtain a special dispensation? I know of a truth that Pilate doth much dislike to violate their laws, but could not consent be obtained from their chief priests?"

The young man looked into his face with great surprise.

"I perceive that thou art not aware of the tenacity of purpose of these Jews. As soon would they give a daughter to one of the dogs that howl in the streets as to a Gentile, and thou couldst not, even by the offer of great wealth, shake their blind faith in the righteousness of their laws and the utter falseness of other teachings. To them the world is bounded by their own country, and no argument would convince them to the contrary. How then could a Roman wed a Jewish maiden, except, perhaps," and his face broadened into a shrewd laugh, "by stealth?"

He stopped and looked at Cestus with a covert smile, studying his face closely, while the centurion stood lost in thought.

"I said by stealth," the young man repeated meaningly, but somewhat in fear, for he knew not how the suggestion would be received, and he had already guessed that Cestus had an object in asking for his views, an opportunity too rare to be slighted.

At length Cestus aroused himself.

"If thou speakest truly," he said, "there is no justice in Jerusalem. What law can stand between a man and a maid when they are determined to be united?"

"Yea," was the crafty response, "but suppose the maid would keep the law and objected to the union on that account?"

"Then she could not truly love. The heart cares naught for the law."

"Be not too certain of that. I have told thee that the Jews are strong in their faith, and as faith and law are the same thing with them, thou canst see, therefore, the difficulty. I can but admire their steadfastness. How can such a question trouble thee, Cestus? Hast thou some companion that would fain wed a Jewish maiden? If she objects, and loves him in spite of that objection, then let him act the brave man, and carry her away to Rome." He laughed gaily and with a bold insinuation in his voice. "Why not, I ask thee? Hast thou not said that love cares naught for law?"

Cestus stared at the youth in amazement, but shook his head vigorously. Still, his face bore the marks

of deep thought, and the suggestion had not fallen upon barren ground.

"Thou art foolishly brave," he said, "and I would fear for thy life if thou shouldst attempt to carry out such a plan. Would not the great Cæsar himself punish thee? Nay, friend, thou didst mean well, but thy speech is unwise. Speak not of violence where love is concerned." He paused a moment; then his face lost its animation. "Bring thou Phrates to me," he said, and the young man instantly left him to carry out the command.

The messenger was swift, and in half an hour Phrates saluted Cestus and bowed down before him to receive the centurion's pardon.

"Thy words are forgotten, Phrates," Cestus said; "but use thy tongue less in the future. I would have thee tell me in plain words the story of thine encounter with the maiden Myria; how thou didst come to accost her, and what words passed between thee. I have pardoned thee because it hath been told me that thou didst not insult her chastity. Speak, and let thy language be full."

"I am of the greatest of fools, noble Cestus," Phrates responded, "and thy generous pardon doth touch my heart. Thou hast been truly informed; I used no improper language towards the maiden, and only spoke to her with the words that my heart was on fire for love of her, which was a ready lie, though she is beautiful enough to burn the soul of any man.

She made merry over my declaration, and it so happened that there were those standing by who repeated the language. Thus I was tormented until my brain became almost crazed. In this manner came up the combat, of which thou wert a part witness, and of which I bear still the marks. By the gods, Pellus is a master swordsman, and I bow before his superior skill, craving thy pardon for the speech. That is all there is to tell, Cestus."

"And it is well for thee there is no more," Cestus replied, greatly relieved. "I will not allow the women of Jerusalem to be insulted by the soldiery under my command, and thou wouldst have been made an example of. But, tell me, didst thou think Myria fair to look upon?"

"Fair to look upon? Yea, divinely fair and beautiful," the scarred veteran of many wars—the hardened soldier of Rome replied. "I could not tear mine eyes away from her, and though I felt nothing of the silly passion of love, there was something within me that stirred mightily when she gazed upon me, even though mockingly. Fair?" and he drew his breath enthusiastically. "The word is not sufficient. Would that I were a handsome Jew for a time that I might approach her, though I hate the race with all my heart."

"And the race doth hate thee," Cestus responded, somewhat bitterly, though his eyes reflected the gladness he felt because of Phrates' praise of Myria.

"The Roman is but a dog, intruding upon their sacred rights. Strange things are being said of us—tales of oppression and cruelty that are false in the telling. Certain it is that feeling is running high against Cæsar, and Pilate is uncertain of his office. What is this tale they are telling of a certain Man of Galilee, who seems to be the cause of much discussion?"

Phrates' face instantly took on an expression of great seriousness, and he shook his head dubiously.

"I know not what it all means," he said slowly; "but he who is called Jesus hath by his good teachings and condemnation of certain customs of the Jews set them all against him. I have heard of no accusation of crime; neither does any man seem to be able to find any guilt in his actions, yet," and his eyes flashed scornfully, "these Jews are finding fault with every word he utters. They know not their own minds."

"True," Cestus admitted; "but what of the claim he is said to have made of being of more than earthly origin?"

"Such matters are beyond me," Phrates replied in a puzzled manner, "and I cannot talk about them. We, of Rome, believe not in the God of Israel, but if such were the true doctrine and the Gods visited the earth in human form, the Man Jesus is leading, according to my idea, the right kind of a life for such a divinity."

"I perceive that thou art a deep thinker, Phrates, and I admire the man who can see the falseness of many of the Jewish traditions. It would be unwise, however, for thee to express such thoughts openly, lest it bring thee into conflict with the priests."

He turned and walked away, going into the street and away from the palace, thinking all the while over the peculiar situation in which he found himself. He had long known of the hatred for the Roman existing in the Jewish heart, but had before this time scorned to notice it, proud in the consciousness of strength. But Myria was a Jewess, a believer in the Israelitish doctrines, and that fact put quite a different aspect upon the case; made him think seriously and consider deeply the cause of the intense hatred. There had never been a period of entire peace since the Roman occupation of Jerusalem, of which fact he was well aware, and, after the matter had been reasoned over in his mind, he felt satisfied that there never would be. The hatred had seemed to increase in violence instead of decreasing, and no amount of concessions from Cæsar appeared to have any effect. The soldiery felt that they were hated, and as individuals resented it, though forbidden to exercise unnecessary restrictions as representatives of Cæsar. And to them the fact that the Jews continually warred and wrangled amongst themselves was very strange and unaccountable. The city was in a ferment of dissatisfaction. Pilate was besieged with

complaints of all kinds, some unreasonable, some plausible, but nearly all prompted by the bitter feeling of hate that held the city in its grasp, threatening to overturn the present government at any moment.

Cestus knew all of this and realized that, being close to Pilate, he would be expected to bear the brunt of the trouble. His office as second centurion was an important one, and required the utmost tact and diplomacy, therefore the fact that he had carried a maiden of Israel through the streets in his arms—a crime against the Jewish laws—came to him suddenly with the conviction that the act would be used against him before Pilate, and the procurator, being afraid to offend the people, would be compelled to punish him for a thing that was, in his estimation, harmless.

And Myria's father had died while in prison after having been arrested by his order. This thought added to his torture of mind, and he made his way to the prison at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

CESTUS found a strong double guard around the prison and was much surprised thereat, though thinking it was because of the many arrests that had been made the night before. He approached the first line of soldiery and saluted them in the regular manner, but the centurion in charge of the men stood silent and immovable, and failed to return the courtesy. Cestus gazed at him with the angry blood slowly mounting to his face, but to make sure that an insult was intended, he raised his hand again. No response was received, the soldier's face only expressing the greatest coldness and disdain. Then Cestus, regarding the insult as final, but not knowing the reason thereof, drew his sword.

"What is thy meaning, friend?" he inquired ominously. "Is it thus thou wouldst bid a comrade the evening's good? Explain thyself, or accord me the satisfaction due for thine act."

"Thou shouldst know," the centurion replied insolently. "I wish no converse with thee."

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"I marvel much at thy words," Cestus said, restraining himself in order to fathom the mystery. He lowered his sword and walked close to the man, looking him squarely in the eye. "If thou art laboring under some personal wrong I give thee leave to speak, and I will see that thou art fully satisfied. I know not what ails thee."

"Thou didst lower the ensigns of Rome but last night, and yet thou dost assume to ask for the good will of those thou hast disgraced. Thou art more dull of comprehension than is thy wont, Cestus, thou champion of Israel."

"And now I understand thee," Cestus replied. "Thou wert of the company that delighted in the shedding of innocent blood in last night's combat. It is well thou hast made thyself known, or I would have greeted thee as a brother and a man. It is well, I say, that thou hast exposed thyself. Dost think that I will pass over thy insult in silence? Nay, I promise thee a full flowing of the blood thou dost so greatly desire. Draw thy sword like a man."

He stepped back a pace and bared his arm, pushing away the flowing sleeves, and his sword flashed in the air like a brand of fire. The offending centurion was not a coward, and following Cestus' example, he drew his own blade. Cestus' face expressed only the utmost contempt, but in the eyes that glistened and shone with a thousand scintillating points of light a certain deadly purpose and dauntless courage was

visible. He measured his antagonist for a moment, then with a cry of rage threw himself forward to the attack. The struggle that followed was so rapid in action as to leave a doubt in the mind of an on-looker which of the combatants was gaining the advantage. Cestus, however, was cool, collected and daring, and pushed his adversary so strongly that in a few moments it was apparent the combat could not last for very long. Suddenly there was a cessation in the action, and the opposing centurion threw down his sword in token of submission, upon which Cestus, without a word, replaced his own in its scabbard and folded his arms, standing silent and stern before the crowd of soldiery that had congregated around them.

"I came to visit the prison," he said, after the man had come to his feet. "Thou art in charge of the guards; dost thou care to oppose mine entrance? I bring no order from Pilate, neither do I ask a favor of thee. Speak to thy men and tell them of thy wishes."

A look of vindictive hatred, not unmixed with admiration for a superior sword, flashed from the centurion's eye.

"I have no right or power to oppose thee, Cestus," he said. "Go thy way." His face was flushed with the shame of the defeat before his men, and his voice was uncertain and wavering. "Go thy way," he repeated, and at a signal the company of soldiers fell back into line.

Cestus spoke no further words, but strode towards the keeper's room. His first knock was not answered, and he brought his fist down upon the panels with such force as to shake the door to its foundation. The guardian of the place was in another part of the building at the moment, but, hearing the vigorous knocking, he hurried to the door and threw it open in a very short space of time.

When he saw who his visitor was he started back and hesitated to admit him, but Cestus strode through the entrance without ceremony and stood before him, his face still set and angry from the encounter with the centurion of the guards.

"I have come to remove the body of Trypho," he said shortly, "and it is well if I find thee ready to deliver at once. Where hast thou placed the remains?"

The keeper hesitated a moment to consider how he should answer, and it was evident that there was something weighing heavily upon his mind that he wished to tell Cestus, but dared not. At length, when the centurion was growing impatient and was about to repeat his question more forcibly, the keeper spoke:

"I cannot deliver the body, Cestus," he said, "for——"

A storm of fury broke over Cestus' face, and he demanded quickly:

"Cannot? Dost mean that thou wilt refuse to

obey without a special order from Pilate? What doth thy language mean?"

"There is no cause for anger, Cestus," the keeper expostulated. "I bring thee good news. Truly I cannot deliver thee the body, because Trypho hath not as yet departed this life, and, if I mistake not the signs, hath long to live. I know the news will please thee, and I would have so informed thee hadst thou not called."

"Surely it doth please me," Cestus responded, his face clearing on the instant, and a great change came over his bearing, before proud and defiant. "Thou dost say he lives?" he asked. "How is it thou didst not discover this fact sooner and thus have saved Myria great sorrow? Thou'rt a blundering fool, but I forgive thee for thy good news. Speak! In what condition is Trypho?"

"Restrain thy impatience and I will inform thee of everything," the keeper replied, making a mental determination, however, to conceal the visit of Malchus and his attempt upon the prisoner's life. "After thou hadst departed I went to the cell of Trypho to dress the body in the best the poor place affords, but found, to my surprise, a breath of life in the supposed corpse, which by nursing and careful attendance was fanned into a flame. He is now quite strong, except, of course, a natural weakness caused by the loss of blood, which will pass away. But of

what good can his recovery be to thee, since Pilate would have his life?"

"Pilate will not refuse my request," Cestus returned proudly, "and I go to him at once. Be thou ready to give him up on my return, for I would restore him to his family. Thy blunder hath cost many tears, and I would set the matter right as soon as possible."

"But how knowest thou that Pilate will grant thy request? Hast thou not heard of the anger of the procurator because of the riot? Did he not set his heart upon bringing the ensigns into Jerusalem, and do our people dare to raise the emblems even at this hour for fear of new trouble? Not only that, but Pilate hath given strict orders as regards the prisoners taken last night."

"Orders to thee direct? What hath Pilate to say that cannot be trusted to other hands for delivery?"

For answer the keeper produced a crumpled piece of parchment, and silently handed it over to the centurion.

"From Pontius Pilate, the procurator," it ran, "to Mithradates, the keeper of the prison: Greeting: It hath come to the ears of the procurator that certain of the Jews do plot an insurrection, and, under cover of the excitement occasioned thereby, a rescue of the prisoners in thy charge. Thou wilt, therefore, keep a close watch and exercise the greatest vigilance, allowing no person to visit a prisoner without a special

order signed by my hand. Thou art empowered to call on all of the soldiers of Rome for such protection as is needed in case of an attempt upon the prison."

Cestus handed the parchment back to the keeper, and his face was white with suppressed rage.

"It surpriseth me not," he said, "and I suppose, in accordance therewith, thou wilt refuse to let me visit Trypho. It is an insult that Pilate should do well to withdraw. Afraid of the Jews? What, doth he think the soldiers of Rome are babes in arms that they fear a conflict? When didst thou receive this wonderful document?"

"But a short time before thou didst come. The words are plain, however, and I can allow no one to visit. Pilate doth evidently mistrust his own men, and hath by this document made of no power the orders of lesser officials."

"Yea, I understand it well, and will not again request admittance. I go to Pilate on the instant."

He walked to the outer door, threw it open and stepped into the street, noticing, as he did so, that a solemn column of soldiery had been drawn up before the building, and their front ranks pressed close upon the exit. The men were standing with drawn swords, stern and motionless, and not a sign of welcome or recognition greeted him as he searched their faces, so well known to him on the field of battle; faces that he had loved to look upon and that were wont to lighten at his approach.

Surprised beyond measure, but with a ready courage and presence of mind, he likewise drew his own sword and stood before them, waiting for the developments, knowing that the movement concerned himself, yet without a tremor in his face to show that he felt anything but supreme indifference. He scorned to question them, and spoke no word.

Presently, as he stood there, erect and unafraid, his eyes glittering with defiance and proud courage, the centurion that had so lately opposed him and who had felt the weight of his sword, approached.

"I called thee a champion of Israel," he said mockingly, "and thou didst dispute with thy sword the accusation. We shall see if thou wilt dare to use thy weapon against Pilate for the same words. Come," and he gave a signal to his men, who closed around Cestus, "if thou wouldst fight now is thy time."

Cestus looked at him with an expression of scorn and contempt.

"I have no fault to find with these men—my brethren," he said, "and it is to their shame that they are under thee. It is well for thee, however, that thou dost surround thyself thus, for I would strike thee to the ground like the dog thou art. What is thy mission with me? Speak, unless thy cowardly tongue refuses to give utterance when thy heart is afraid unto death." He glanced at the faces surrounding him, and in more than one now found the sympathy

he wished. "Speak!" he again demanded sternly. "What is thy mission with me? Let it be told quickly."

"Cestus, second Centurion of the guards, thou art arrested by direct order of the procurator. Resist at thy peril."

A shock passed through the frame of the young man—a spasmodic contraction of the hands was visible, yet his face remained calm and unmoved. In the instant that followed he counted the cost; remembered that Myria would be unprotected and her father be without aid; that he would be unable to assist him in any way, and he would probably go to his death. He called to mind all the happenings of the previous night and the morning, and realized that the charges against him would stand, which meant that his death would surely follow, for there is but one penalty known to Rome for such an action. In spite of all this, however, he did not lose for an instant the expression of indifference and contempt that had settled upon his face.

"Pilate hath chosen a puny messenger," he said coldly, "but I obey—not thy command, but that of the procurator. Call upon thy men, thy courage is not equal to the occasion." He handed his sword to the centurion with a pitying gesture. "Take thou the weapon thou couldst not resist; it cannot fail to please thy little soul to thus gain a bloodless victory.

Away, and afterwards thou canst boast of the deed to those who believe in thy valor."

He folded his arms, threw his head proudly erect, and stepped forward into the ranks. The young centurion, victorious though crestfallen and singularly without a feeling of glory and satisfaction over the conquest, gave the word of command, and the column moved away from the prison with its prisoner—who, while yet a captive, was still the victor.

CHAPTER VIII.

LION AND LAMB.

MALCHUS, the arch-hypocrite, the suave, smooth faced and insinuating knave, was known to only a few in his true character. His power of deception was so great and his manners so mild and unoffending when wishing to propitiate or gain his own ends, that the mask of goodness sat easily upon his false countenance. He was a man of a twofold nature—soft and gentle as a woman when it suited his purpose so to be, but hard and cruel when opposed and thwarted. Yet, so carefully was his second, or baser, nature concealed beneath the cloak of righteous forbearance and piety as to make it impossible for an accusation to be brought against him except indirectly and without proof.

In some way he had succeeded in gaining an influence at the Roman court, though a Jew, and supposedly against everything pertaining to Rome. Under the laws of Israel a Jew was forbidden to set foot within a Gentile house, which, of course, included the court; but Malchus easily met and overcame this difficulty by sending another in his place—oftentimes

a renegade soldier of Rome—one in the power of the crafty Jew and bound to obey him in all things or suffer the consequence of having certain misdeeds—trivial in themselves, but magnified to mountain-like enormity—exposed.

Malchus knew nothing of mercy towards his fellow men, and had no consideration for the pain or suffering that might be caused to others because of his evil acts. Among his own people he was powerful. As the servant of the high priest, a position humble in title, but offering great opportunities for swaying the mighty men of the Jews, he was highly regarded, and many were those who came to him for assistance, which was always given when the crafty servant's wealth was augmented thereby, but refused on the plea of inability otherwise.

He was shrewd enough to recognize the fact that Pilate, the procurator, really feared the Jewish people, and humored them as far as possible in order to keep down complaint from Rome, for in the troublous times existing he was held strictly accountable to Cæsar for the peace of Jerusalem and the content of the people under his rule. Malchus knew this, and he had not failed to take advantage of it as occasion offered.

As a base, untrue nature will sometimes be attracted towards and love a true, holy spirit without in the least considering its own unworthiness, so did he love the beautiful and pure Jewess, Myria, the

cherished blossom and pride of Jerusalem, and having, for the first time in his loveless life, felt the dominating influence of the passion in his heart, he determined to win her, if not possible honorably, then by any means in his power.

But her father, the venerable Trypho, had been one of the few to recognize the soul that lived within him; had seen in all its hideousness the perfidious spirit of the man, and with the frankness and truthfulness of a devout son of Israel, had told him plainly of his discovery. Malchus had endeavored to overcome this objection, and to that end had lavished upon him all the blandishments so glibly on his tongue, but of no avail, for the sturdy old man had obstinately refused to believe in his good intentions and had forbidden him in no measured terms to enter the house. Thus was the evil heart of Malchus embittered towards him, but being next to those high in power, he found excuses time after time to enter the house, professing to be a messenger for some sacred rites, but in reality only to see Myria.

The maiden maintained towards him a passive indifference, neither repulsing or receiving his advances; in truth she did not understand that he had any more than a friendly interest in her. In the seclusion of her home—she seldom went out on the streets, except with her father—she had heard nothing as to his character, and in her innocence of heart gave him credit for being a good man. If she had

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understood his character and purpose her heart would have recoiled from him, yet feminine nature is the same the world over, and his meek, priestly demeanor gave no clew to the villainy that was raging in his heart, and neither did her father warn her of him, trusting her to recognize him as he had done.

When Malchus left Cestus after the somewhat rough reception he had received, he went straight to the home of Myria, his face bearing a well simulated look of sorrow and grief because of her loss. He believed Trypho to be dead, for the stroke he had given him was intended to end his life.

He found the two—mother and child—utterly cast down with sorrow, and his knock not being answered, he walked boldly in, knowing that Trypho was not there to oppose his entrance.

Myria was trying to comfort her mother when he entered the room, and she did not hear his approach. The aged woman was rocking in a paroxysm of violent grief, and Myria sat with her arms around her, tenderly brushing back the white, silvery hair. For a moment Malchus stood in the open doorway regarding them, and the look upon his face was that of a fiend gloating over the misery of a victim. This look was soon succeeded, however, by an expression of deep cunning, as he saw their helpless condition. There was no mistaking the fact that he intended to take advantage of their being unprotected to further his own purposes.

He suddenly made a slight noise, and Myria looked up in affright.

"Be not afraid," he said, walking over to where she sat. "I came to help thee. Would that I could bring some consoling word to thee, but it is too late for that. The Roman dog hath triumphed, and his demand for blood hath been satisfied. Grieve not, Myria; thou shalt be avenged; they shall pay for thy father's death."

Myria looked up at him, her eyes red with weeping, and a wondering look stole into their liquid depths.

"I understand thee not," she replied sadly. "What have I to do with vengeance? Will it restore my father?"

"Nay," he said; "but it will cause thee to grieve the less if thou canst know his death is well repaid. Wouldst thou forgive those who have murdered him? Thou art not a true daughter of Israel if thou wouldst, and I tell thee," his voice was lowered and ringing with passion, "thy father's blood calls for vengeance. It is in thy hands, though thou know it not."

She arose and stood before him, the loose robe she wore falling about her figure in graceful folds.

"Thy language is of a strange nature," she responded. "How is it thou dost speak of vengeance when thou art of the priesthood, that teaches of such things being in the hands of God? My father was

wounded while fighting for what he believed to be right, that is, resisting the invasion of Jerusalem by the ensigns of Cæsar. How, then, canst thou speak of vengeance, when the army of Rome is to blame, and not any one man?"

"But I tell thee, Myria, that one man was to blame for thy father's death; that he alone caused him to be thrust into prison, thus bringing as sure an end as by the sword! What wouldst thou say of such a man, and would thy friendship long endure for him?"

She covered her face with her hands, and a shudder ran over her from head to foot. Directly, however, she withdrew the covering and looked at him calmly.

"I would have no friendship for such a man," she replied coldly; "but thou art mistaken. It was not one man, but a company of soldiers."

"Doth a company of soldiers act without an order from its commander?" he inquired mercilessly. "Would the men of their own accord dare to make an arrest of an aged man, already wounded unto death and not able to do further harm? Tell me, dost thou think the soldiers of Rome have nothing else to do but arrest those who are harmless? Nay, thy heart speaks for thee! Then, granting that thou dost admit the truth of my reasoning, who was that commander, that Centurion, if called by his proper title, and is he not to blame for thy father's death?"

"Nay, speak not so," she cried passionately. "I believe not thy words! He but did his duty, and saved my father from a worse fate than death—that of being trampled under foot in the streets. Say no more, I beseech thee; thy words torture me, and my heart is breaking already. Leave me, if thou art a friend."

A look of malicious pleasure lighted up his face, but her head was bowed and she did not perceive it.

"I would not wound thy heart, Myria," he replied, "but it is necessary that thou shouldst be undeceived. It is not the duty of a soldier to arrest the old or very young, and if the centurion had in mind so to do he could have ordered his men to surround thy father and protect him. But not so for him; there was more glory in an arrest, and Pilate will think more highly of him, even though the victim is innocent of the crimes that may be charged against him. I know well the laws of Rome; they have no regard for the people of Jerusalem. Cestus could have——"

"Say no more, I beg," she cried, sinking to her knees in an agony of grief. "Thou art but adding to my misery. My father cannot be brought back to life."

"But I must say on," he responded with cruel persistence, and gloating over each stroke as it fell upon her fair head. "Thou wert at the jail this morning and saw with thine own eyes where he had thy father confined. Consider a moment—if he but did his

duty in having him arrested, was it necessary to thrust an additional degradation upon him by confining him with the vilest inmates of the place? Could he not have given him more pleasant quarters, knowing him to be thy father? He hath the authority to open the cell and make any transfer that he doth choose. I ask thee, therefore, if thou dost think him very careful of thy father's welfare? And yet thou wert friendly with him even after such an indignity, and did permit him to carry thee—yea, carry thee in his arms," as she shrank away from him in maidenly shame, "through the streets. What will the people of Jerusalem think of thee, to be thus intimate with a Roman dog? Dost thou trust in his honor? Shame, Myria; thou shouldst know the Roman character better. The men are but libertines, and the women too vile for the tongue of an Israelite to mention." He strode about the apartment with rage only half assumed. "Wouldst thou be friendly with thy father's murderer?" he demanded suddenly, and the bowed figure quivered with pain.

"Cease thy words," she implored piteously. "I cannot follow thy reasoning with this great grief in my heart. Tell me no more of thy suspicions. Canst thou not see that my mother needs all the comfort I can give her, and thou art but adding to the pain?"

He opened his lips to speak again, but on the instant a change took place in her, and she looked into his face fearlessly.

"I believe Cestus to be an honorable man," she said simply. Then, with gathering indignation: "He would not intrude upon the house of sorrow as thou hast done, and I think it not unseemly that he carried me through the streets in his arms, there being no better way at hand. What wouldst thou have had him do? I believe not thy words as to the men of Rome, though I be of Israel. There is no nobler man in Jerusalem than Cestus."

Malchus' eyes flashed with a dangerous light, and he turned away from her for a moment to hide his feelings, but in an instant he had gained the mastery, and with a well simulated look of sympathy and offended dignity, gazed straight into her face.

"I spoke for thy good, Myria," he said softly, "and would warn thee to beware of those who wear the service of Rome. They are false-hearted, and trifle with women for the sake of amusement alone." She started violently, and he knew he had hit upon something that would reach her heart. "Cestus is not above the others who serve Rome. Rumor hath it that he is daily seen with women of questionable character—women who are known to all the city as being utterly without virtue, and I doubt not that he hath many mistresses in Rome. But why should that surprise thee, since it is a common thing in the city of the Cæsar? Virtue is laughed at, and almost unknown, and a soldier is the greater because of many conquests over women. Hath not Pilate been

obliged to send swift punishment upon those of his army caught tempting the maidens of Jerusalem? Wouldst thou suffer because of lack of knowledge when I offer to enlighten thee? I would tell thee further that it is commonly reported that thy centurion—this same Cestus—was a participant in a drunken brawl in the room where the company over which he hath command doth assemble, and all because of some woman of whom he was jealous. Some remark was made about her by a comrade—why should not any one be at liberty to talk of such women?—and Cestus liked it not; therefore he drew his sword and would have slain had others not interfered. That is the character of him thou dost think honorable. I blush for thee, thou maiden of Israel, in whose heart the holy teachings of centuries hath been implanted.”

“And I for thee,” she cried indignantly, “that thou shouldst bring to me such lies—such stupid, unreasoning lies. Thou canst not know Cestus, or thou wouldst not so speak of him. I believe thee not!” She would not betray that his words had sunk deep into her heart, but the effort brought the tears to her eyes. “Go!” she said passionately. “I would be alone.”

He stood for a moment as if turned to stone, then slowly approached her.

“Be not angry with me, Myria, for speaking what is good for serious reflection on thy part. I would

protect thee from all danger, and thou dost not know the peril that encompasses thee. If thou wouldst but accept my protection—I mean more than a friendly protection—and would give me the right to care for thee, I——”

He stopped short, transfixed by the look of horror in her eyes—an abhorrence that hardly needed words to express. She pointed to the door silently, and in spite of himself he obeyed her. A stronger command could not have been spoken or a more complete refusal uttered, and the brute nature of the man was cowed by her pure innocence.

At the door, however, he recovered his presence of mind, and turned to her with a taunting word.

“From thy speech,” he said, “I would think thee a follower of that Nazarene who hath caused great trouble in Jerusalem. Look well to thy tongue, fair Myria, and give no utterance to any false doctrine, lest thy words betray thee.”

“I have heard my father speak of Him,” she responded, “and that He teaches nothing but love and forgiveness. I would follow such teaching rather than thine,” and, with an imperious gesture, she turned away from him.

But if Malchus could have seen the bitter tears that were shed after he had gone; could he have understood the agony that was in her heart when she reflected over the accusations against Cestus, of his supposed perfidy and his part in the incarceration of

her father, he would have been satisfied with the seed he had planted. For many hours afterwards she sat by her mother's side thinking, with a dumb, uncomplaining grief that was the more terrible because she dared not share it with another, her eyes now red with weeping, and again dull and heavy with sorrow, until at last she hurried to her own room and threw herself across her bed, giving away to a flood of tears, crying out in her heart of hearts that it could not be so; that it was all false, and that she would believe in Cestus despite what might be said against him.

CHAPTER IX.

A ROMAN COURT.

THE palace of the procurator—sometimes called the Governor—of Jerusalem was in the very center of the city and surrounded on all sides by the dwellings of Roman citizens. It was in truth a palace, and the inmates were lovers of pleasure—a love that they had carried with them from dissipated Rome, for in that city a strange mingling of restraint and freedom was allowed. Cæsar allowed no man to forget that he was a citizen of Rome and subject to a call to arms at any moment by the throne, but he imposed no rules for private living, and no code of morals was extant. Thus, because of the very laxity of morals, none sought to preach to his neighbor, and it was only natural that those who came to Jerusalem fresh from Rome rebelled against the strictness of the Jewish laws—against restrictions that were met on every side, and which they were bound to observe or else come into conflict with the stern, unflinching dogmas of a people so utterly different from their own as to seem to be of another world.

But within the palace of the procurator no laws

were known or restrictions imposed, except the will of the governor, and because he cared very little as to the manner of pleasure those rules and restrictions were few. For this very reason, as well as because of the unchangeable law forbidding a Jew to enter a Gentile house, Pilate was compelled to hold his court, when a Jewish prisoner was to be tried, upon the marble pavement in front of the palace.

The procurator was a man of many moods; at times stern and rigid in judgment, and again full of mercy and consideration. He secretly feared the Jews—they had caused him much trouble since his ascension to office—and in every way possible he tried to please them. This he found hard to do, for the reason that they were strongly prejudiced against Roman rule, which was a natural result of former persecutions, and harassed the procurator with innumerable petty complaints. He dismissed them all with scanty justice, only wishing to be rid of them, and in many instances failed to redress a real grievance.

On the morning after the army—which had been brought in to enable him to set aside many of the Jewish laws—had entered Jerusalem and had met with a vigorous resistance on the part of the people, he was sore troubled. The peaceful entrance he had expected had not taken place, and the slaughter in the market place was sure to be heard of in Rome. If he could only find some way to propitiate the Jews,

could grant them some special favor, and deceive them into thinking he was working for their good, he reasoned that the incident of last night would be forgotten. But he could think of no way, could devise no feasible scheme, and, puzzled his brain as he might, he could not prevent an outcry against his reign that would reach a higher power, thus causing his dethronement.

In this frame of mind—worried and distracted over the possible outcome of the slaughter—he made his way to the banquet hall where the morning meal was being served, though it was near to the hour of noon. He sat at the head of the table, raised a little way from the floor, his countenance troubled and his brow wrinkled with thought, hardly tasting the food before him and feeling sadly out of place.

But the women who were gathered at the table were accustomed to his ways, and, after the morning's greetings had been passed and he had been respectfully saluted, their gaiety ran carelessly, not at all awed by the fact that the greatest man of Jerusalem sat with them, for such is the intimacy of close association.

“Of a truth, it must have been a gay sight,” one of them cried merrily, “to see the swords fall upon the white-headed fanatics yester night. And the shouting of the brave soldiers of Rome—how I would have liked to have heard it. Did the fools think they could oppose Rome without having their heads

broken? Who cares for the death of a few Jews; are they not in the way at the best? Would they not deny us all pleasure?"

"Thou art gay over the shedding of blood," was the reply, in mock horror, whereat the company laughed heartily. "If thou hadst lost the head of thy lover in the fray then would thy face be lengthened instead of merry. Hast heard from him since the night?"

"Nay, but I fear not; he is too brave a soldier to die elsewhere than on the battlefield. But what if he were dead; are there not others?" Her roguish, laughing face sparkled with merriment, and she sprang to her feet impulsively. "Let us not talk of blood, but of more pleasant things. What better subject than men; indeed, what other subject would interest a woman? And what other man but Cestus, the handsome young centurion, could interest thee, Paulina? Ah, thou didst think to keep thy secret," as the rich blood sprang into the other's face; "but thine eyes speak for thee."

"I understand thee not," Paulina replied, somewhat haughtily. "What canst thou know of Cestus?"

"Much more of him than thou wouldst have me tell," impertinently. She bent over Paulina's shoulder and whispered into her ear: "I have long perceived thy love for Cestus, and I blame thee not. Doth he lack any of the bravery of a man of war or



any of the daring of youth? Is he not courageous and handsome? What more could a woman want? Nay, thou canst see his virtues as well as I, so why shouldst thou seek to conceal thy passion from me? But I bid thee beware; thou hast a dangerous rival."

Paulina's eyes lost their haughtiness on the instant, but a dangerous expression succeeded, and her bosom palpitated.

"I believe it not," she cried, "no woman would dare——"

"Ah, then thou dost admit thy passion," triumphantly. "Thou canst not conceal thy heart from me. But remember thy rival or thou art in a fair way to lose the gallant Cestus."

Paulina's face became a picture of conflicting emotions. Rage and a desire for information struggled with her pride—mortally wounded because another had fathomed her secret. In another moment she had thrown aside all reserve, and bent forward, eager to hear. She was of a dark type of beauty, imperious and commanding in appearance, but around the corners of her bright eyes lurked an expression of cruel sensuality that almost destroyed the charm of her features—the kind of a woman that brooks no interference, that allows no other to tread upon grounds sacred to her, and that thinks no deed too dark if the object of her heart's desire be gained. Her lips were parted in an attempt to smile, but the effort was a failure.

"Thou wouldst amuse thyself," she said, watching closely for a possible confirmation—something she hardly hoped for. A shadow of pain passed over her face, leaving the play of passion fully exposed, and in a moment her breath came in short gasps. "Tell me of her," she continued fiercely; "what is she like and what is her name? Is she beautiful and—wealthy? Is she more beautiful than I?"

"Calm thyself, Paulina," the other replied, alarmed at the strength of passion displayed. "I will tell thee everything that I know. She is of the common people—a Jewess—not of noble birth, as thou; but she is beautiful. Yea, of surpassing beauty, and report hath it that she is pure." She laughed gaily and cynically. "What sayest thou to that—pure? It can only mean inexperienced, and is a virtue not to be desired. Art thou pure? And still I think thou art charming."

"Then I fear her not," Paulina responded, somewhat relieved, "for she lacks life and spirit, and Cestus, the daring, the imperious, cannot care for her. A passing fancy, perhaps—a new toy—and——"

"Be not so sure of that, Paulina," tormentingly. "Hast thou not heard how Cestus carried her through the streets but this morning in his arms. A bad sign for thee, Paulina—a bad sign, surely."

A storm of passionate rage seized Paulina, and for several moments she could not speak. Her face became flushed and red, then paled as the blood receded,

leaving a pallor that resembled death. Presently her head went up and an angry flush glowed in either cheek.

"I care not," she said, but her manner belied her words. "Cestus is nothing to me, and hath a right to carry any maiden that he pleaseth through the streets. Why hast thou told me this thing? Thinkest thou that I care?"

"Yea, I know that thou dost, and I tell thee for thine own good. It is not in thee to sit idly by and see thy lover carried off by another when thou couldst win him by thy superior wit and beauty. It is unlike thee, Paulina, and I know thou art trying to deceive me into believing that thou art indifferent. Wouldst thou let Myria, the Jewess, conquer thee?"

"Conquer?" A strong play of passion distorted her face, and a cruel, vindictive expression blotted out all the womanliness of her countenance. An enraged tigress, ready for the fatal spring upon a victim, could not have appeared more relentless, and the look she gave the woman before her would have annihilated a less hardy or careless creature. "Conquer?" she repeated scornfully. "How canst thou use the word towards me? It implies naught but weakness on the part of the conquered. This pale woman—this virtuous creature, so much talked of and praised in Jerusalem—shall not love Cestus. I forbid it—I, his first love. Thinkest thou so poorly of me? I do admit to thee that I have thought of Cestus—have

admired him greatly, but I have not loved him." Her voice became softened and her eyes looked into her friend's face searchingly. "But if he care for me—is that my fault? Dost thou believe he regards me other than friendly?"

"I know not, but I did think it so before this woman came," was the unsatisfactory response. What woman can deceive another in affairs of the heart? "Hath he said nothing to thee of his feelings? Surely thou—with all thine art in the matter of love—canst cause him to express himself."

"I have not tried, thinking all was well, but now——" Her looks became menacing, and she paused for breath.

"And now?" questioningly.

"Let her—this woman of Israel—look well to herself," and with a glance wherein was expressed all the hatred that a wicked woman can summon to her aid, she arose from her seat and left the room.

The procurator—Pilate—had at first paid very little attention to the conversation between the women, preferring to be silent, but a chance word about the young centurion, Cestus, had reached his ears, and he understood that some act had been committed that would place the officer in an embarrassing position. Thereafter he listened closely, though apparently uninterested, and learned the nature of the indiscretion. His face expressed a certain kind of satisfaction over the news, though what dark thoughts were passing

through his brain no one could have told, and when Paulina left the room he was not slow to follow, going direct to the hall of judgment, where the noonday court was in readiness for his appearance.

The room was without decorations, bearing, indeed, the very atmosphere of rigid and unrelenting justice. Rome provided no palatial halls in which to render judgment, nor did she take much thought for the comfort of those who were condemned under her laws.

Pilate walked rapidly to a raised platform—resembling a rude throne—in the farther end of the cheerless room, and seated himself thereupon. A signal from him caused the officers of the court to hasten to their places, and a hush fell upon those assembled around, for the person of the procurator was sacred.

The procurator showed his skill in disposing of a number of cases—erratic complaints of a personal nature—rapidly, and was about to retire, when a centurion approached and raised his hand respectfully.

“What wouldst thou?” the procurator inquired.

“I would speak to thee privately,” was the reply, and having gained a favorable answer, he walked close beside the throne. “I would ask thee to uphold the dignity of the army of Cæsar.” Pilate started and bent forward eagerly, and the man continued: “Thou art aware of the great resistance the army met yester night upon entering the city, but it hath not been reported to thee what followed. One of thine officers—a man who was much trusted—hath shown

himself to be a traitor to Rome. I think it well to inform thee fully."

"Thou dost surprise me greatly," Pilate replied incredulously. "Whom dost thou accuse, and why? Thy words are of great import, and thou shouldst be careful of thy speech."

"I speak from personal knowledge, most noble Pilate. I was present and saw with mine own eyes. Not only did this man step between the soldiers of Cæsar and the people who were opposing them, but pulled down and degraded two banners of Rome. I bring thee proof such as will convince thee of the truth of my words."

"And the man?"

"Cestus, the second Centurion of the guards, one of those thou wouldst trust with thy life. He is false to thee and friendly to the Jews at heart, though they know it not and hate him much. I bring the accusation in the name of the soldiery of Rome, who are insulted because of this outrage. They look to thee for redress, and thou wilt not fail them."

Pilate thought rapidly for a moment, and the dark design that had been developing in his brain since he had heard the talk of the women began to take deep root. This Cestus was hated of the Jews, and had brought himself into disrepute with the Roman soldiery by lowering the banners of Rome. He would please both the Jews and the Romans by punishing

him. Had he not committed an indiscretion that would bring down the wrath of the Israelites upon his head, and would it not be a master stroke if he—the just procurator—could gain the favor of both sides by a severe judgment upon the young centurion? What matter the offence? The scheme passed through his mind like a flash, and, without hesitation that could be noticed, he turned to the officers at his side.

“Arrest and bring before me at once the second centurion of the guards, Cestus,” he commanded, and without a word they turned to obey.

“I thank thee,” the accuser began, but Pilate waived him aside with an imperious gesture.

“It is enough. Appear thou before me on the morrow and give thy testimony, when Cestus shall have a second hearing.”

He walked majestically from the room, his gaunt, tall figure passing through the parted ranks of bowing, servile courtiers regardless of their fawning smiles and flattery, for in his mein, despite the soul that lurked within him, there was something that awed and impressed upon them the dignity of a man of affairs.

The accusing centurion—the tool of Malchus, the Jew—stood without the palace for a moment after he had been dismissed, and smiled triumphantly, then sped away to report to his employer—his master—the result of his work.

Shortly afterwards a woman, closely veiled and violently agitated, was also hurrying away from the place, but bound for a different part of the city. The face beneath the veil was that of Paulina, the vengeful, and her haste denoted that she considered her mission to be of great importance.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE THE PROCURATOR.

THE city soon rang with the news of the arrest of Cestus, and excitement ran high, for the centurion was near in power to the procurator, and, so thought the people, the incident must have some special political meaning. To the Jews, especially, the affair was puzzling. They remembered—indeed, it had been the subject for much conversation—that he had strangely enough taken sides against the soldiery of Rome in favor of the people that were being slaughtered the night before, but they could not understand that such an act could possibly call for his arrest, since it had saved Rome from further crime in the shedding of innocent blood. True, he had violated the customs and laws of Israel by carrying a Jewish maiden through the streets in his arms, but, they argued, what Roman soldier had not done worse and had not been punished by the procurator? They knew, for the rumor had spread in a mysterious way, that Pilate had brought the army of Cæsar into Jerusalem for no other purpose than to set aside the an-

cient laws of Israel. How, then, was it that he proposed to punish one so high in power for such a slight offence, especially when it was not against Rome, but Israel, that it had been committed? Could it be that the procurator had abandoned his purpose of annulling their laws, and had decided to uphold them to the letter, or was the arrest of the young centurion merely a move to deceive them into believing in his leniency, so that he could surprise them by fresh and unprecedented outrages? The wise men shook their heads and ventured to spread many opinions—some of them near the truth, though they knew it not.

In the company room where the soldiers under Cestus' command were assembled consternation reigned supreme, and the men were not soft of speech in their indignant protests. They could not believe that Cestus had been guilty of any act to merit such a degradation. They knew him to be brave and of a quick temper, but never dishonorable or dishonest, and in all the empire of Cæsar there was not a more loyal company to its commander than this body of courageous, almost recklessly brave, fighting men.

Phrates, that hardy old veteran, forgetting his own arrest, was loud in his condemnation of the indignity. His utterances were more forcible than complimentary towards Pilate. He was in a torrent of virtuous wrath, and cared not who heard him.

"By the living gods," he cried angrily, "doth this puppet—this miserable representative of a power that

knows him not—think he can thus insult the bravest man in Jerusalem? It is an outrage, and I, for one, will speak my mind, though I lose my head. Cestus arrested! Think of it, ye men of Rome; Cestus, the noblest of noble blood, arrested because it pleaseth the procurator of Jerusalem! Shame on ye, that ye stand by and voice not your indignation. To arms, say I, and rescue him ere he taste of the prison fare! It were better that Pilate himself be imprisoned than to have Cestus spend one hour—one moment in captivity. Buckle on your swords and follow me, and——”

“I am of thy mind, Phrates,” a comrade replied, checking his impetuous speech; “but thy words are indiscreet. What if they should come to the ears of Pilate?”

“Then let him do what he will; I have no fear. Are ye men or women, and will ye stand idly by and permit such a thing without raising your arms in behalf of the commander who, while yet in power, was still a genial and hearty comrade? Shame on ye, I say. I could not count, without including every man in the company, those who have received a favor at his hands, and I call on ye as men. We will go to Pilate and demand his release. How many swords are there among you that will leap forth at my command?”

“I am with thee, Phrates!” cried a lusty voice from the rear of the room, and instantly a wave of

The Court of Pilate

enthusiasm swept over the men, and the noise of shouting became deafening. Every man tried to shout the louder in offering his sword, though knowing full well that it meant death to them all in thus opposing the commands of the procurator.

Phrates smiled grimly and stepped upon an elevation, so as to be seen and heard.

"Then, in the name of Cestus, and because he is not here to command, I take charge of this company. To the procurator! We shall demand a hearing."

"To the procurator! To the procurator!" came echoes from all parts of the room, and the men formed in solid line from sheer force of habit. Phrates drew his sword and gave the signal, and the men marched out of the room, their faces set in an expression of grim determination, and beneath each coat there beat a heart filled with high indignation, regardless of the fate that might be meted out to them because of this mutiny.

When they emerged from the room and were fairly upon the street they found that a vast crowd of people had congregated in front of the palace; a mass of excited humanity that surged and swayed in the heat of intense and powerful interest. The name of Cestus was in everybody's mouth, and the comments varied from great satisfaction and pleasure over his arrest to indignation and bitter condemnation of the action of the procurator. But, comment as they might and surmise as they did, no one could fathom

the purpose of that august personage, self-contained and always reticent. An unusual and mysterious trial was about to take place, and its meaning was of sufficient interest to excite curiosity, and those who thought they knew came to confirm their views, while others, candidly ignorant, came to ascertain what it all meant.

The hum of expectation and curiosity was at its height when the great doors of the palace opened and slaves came forth bearing the bema, a throne-like chair, for Pilate had thought it best to hold his court upon the marble pavement, there being so much to interest the Jews. The bema was carefully placed, then a hush fell upon the multitude, for Pilate appeared and walked slowly forward. Upon his face there was an inscrutable smile that gave no clew to what was passing in his mind. His long robe of state, fitting the attenuated figure loosely, added a peculiar dignity to the face that was otherwise weak and undecided in character. His eye glanced over the crowd carelessly, but he took in at a glance every detail of the scene.

Phrates saw him as soon as he had crossed the threshold of the palace entrance, and a sharp word of command caused his men to press forward through the crowd until they had advanced very close to the seat of judgment, where they stood at rest like statues, looking neither to the right nor the left.

Pilate observed them, and started in surprise as

he recognized the company of Cestus. He did not check his advance, however, but walked to the bema and took his seat, which was instantly followed by an excited surging forward of the crowd. The soldiery surrounding him threw themselves forward and held back the throng, however, and with a motion of his hand Pilate announced that he was ready.

"Bring unto me Cestus, the second centurion," he said to an officer standing by. "Is he in readiness?"

"He is, most noble Pilate," the officer responded, "and hath been for some hours. I go to obey thine order."

A silence fell upon the people, and Pilate spoke no more. Presently a column of soldiers issued forth from the palace door and approached the procurator. In their midst a man was walking, his face calm and contemptuous, his bearing without fear, and in his eyes there was a glitter of defiance. A short distance from the throne he left the column and walked forward, facing the procurator boldly.

"Thou hast sent for me, and I am here," he said, looking straight forward without the quiver of a muscle in his face. "What wouldst thou of me, and why these guards? I am a free Roman," proudly, "and need no bond except my word."

"Thou art accused, Cestus, second centurion of the guards, of having violated the Jewish law by carrying a maiden of Israel in thine arms, and of having degraded the banners of Rome by throwing them in

the dust before the eyes of the people. What hast thou to say?"

"To the first charge, nothing," Cestus responded defiantly, "except that under like circumstances I would repeat the offence, if offence it be. I care nothing for the opinion of the people when it is in opposition to common humanity."

"And," Pilate continued coldly, "thou art also accused of trying to seduce the maiden whom thou didst carry, and hast used thy power as a centurion of Rome to further thy purpose. I thought thee honorable towards women, but thou has deceived me."

Cestus' face changed from calm to storm, his eyes flashed like the gleam of a sword, and his brow became furrowed with intense feeling.

"If thou wilt but bring before me the author of such a charge," he cried, "I will prove to thee his cowardice. Wouldst thou believe the word of a dog? Who is he that makes the accusation?"

"A godly man, according to the Jewish religion, and one friendly with the father of the maiden thou didst attempt to seduce, doth witness against thee." He turned aside and spoke to an officer, who left at once.

A man presently came before the procurator and bowed his head humbly, the picture of respectful obedience. When he raised his face Cestus could not prevent a cry of rage from escaping his lips.

"Thy name is Malchus, I understand," Pilate said

to the cringing figure, "and thou art devout in works of religion pertaining to thy peculiar faith. Is it not so?"

"It is, noble Pilate," was the response in a soft, measured tone, that deceived those who heard as to the character of the man.

"And thou wert familiar with the father of the Jewish maiden whom Cestus is accused of having tried to wrong?"

"Even so," Malchus responded, not varying his meek attitude in the least. "Very friendly, and on most intimate terms. We were as brothers, and I grieve much over his untimely death. But it is part of our religion to seek consolation from on high in all grief, and I am resigned."

"How knowest thou that Cestus tried to seduce?"

"I bear him no malice, and with thy permission, most noble Pilate, I would hold my tongue. It would be unseemly for a servant of God to seek to injure a fellow creature. Wilt thou not allow me to depart in peace?"

A murmur of admiration for this seemingly holy man broke from the crowd, and some cried out indignantly that the Roman had no right to force the man of God to speak as a witness in such a crime. Malchus heard their protests, and a deep delight filled his breast. He had spoken so as to conceal his pleasure in giving the false testimony, and knew that his

seeming reluctance would impress the people with his goodness of heart.

"I called thee to give testimony," Pilate said shortly, "and thou art commanded to speak. How dost thou know that Cestus tried to seduce the maiden?"

"I obey thy command," Malchus said, with apparent hesitation, "but it grieves me to testify against Cestus. Trypho, the father of Myria, who is the maiden in question, honored me with his confidence before his death, and, in compliance with many requirements of our holy religion, I went often to his home. He confessed to me with a great flow of tears that he was in sore distress because of the persecution of his beautiful daughter by a soldier high in authority in the service of Rome, and whom he dared not offend. He told me that the soldier had threatened him with great punishment should he interfere in any way with his infamous pursuit, and even boasted that he would slay his daughter should she not submit. I counselled patience and prayer, believing that he would be protected by a higher power than Rome, but on the day before his death I had it from his own lips that the soldier had threatened him with imprisonment and death if he gained not his purpose before the morrow. If thou wilt but call to mind the arrest of Trypho by the centurion, Cestus, it will bear out my testimony, most noble Pilate, and will

convince thee that I speak only the truth, though it grieves me to do so."

"But I have it that Cestus was strangely unwilling to arrest Trypho," Pilate said, and a murmur of disapproval ran through the crowd that he should presume to doubt the testimony so clearly borne out by the facts.

"True," Malchus responded in an injured tone, "but doth it not seem to thee a trick to cover his real purpose, a mask, as it were, to hide his murderous intentions. I have spoken truly, and I beg of thee to let me depart in peace."

Pilate's face expressed both surprise and pleasure. He had not expected to find it an easy matter to convict Cestus, but the way seemed now very clear.

Cestus had stood with his hands behind his back, and trying with all the force of will he could summon to restrain himself. He saw that the sympathy of the crowd was with Malchus—that Jewish pretender, hypocrite and perjurer, and realized that any violence on his part at this juncture would weigh against him heavily. Pilate noticed his increasing agitation, but attributed it to guilt.

"It will be an easy matter to verify thy words," he said to Malchus, "by calling the maiden herself." He turned to give the command, but Malchus sprang quickly forward and interrupted him.

"Nay, I pray thee disturb her not," he said hurriedly, "for she is stricken with grief and could not

speak before thee and the multitude. I pray thee to remember that the centurion is of good countenance, and it may be that the maiden would be an unwilling witness on that account. We of Israel admit no women to our halls of judgment unless there be no other way to obtain testimony, and even then with great fear that the truth be not told."

"And it is a wise rule," Pilate admitted, "for no reliance can be placed in a woman's testimony when a man is concerned. Thou canst depart; it is enough, and there are other things to be tried against Cestus."

Malchus bowed his thanks, and with a crafty smile on his face that was full of suavity, turned to leave the presence of the procurator, but Cestus, unable to control himself longer and bursting with rage against the lying priest, by a powerful movement of his right arm scattered the soldiers surrounding him and sprang forward. In an instant he had seized Malchus, and, before he could be stopped, lifted him high in the air, and with a mighty effort threw him bodily over the heads of the soldiery and into the dense mass of people beyond. After he had done this he folded his arms and stood still, facing the procurator and waiting for what might follow. His face was pale and scornful, and his calmness had returned.

For a time the people were unable to comprehend what had been done, then when they understood that a priest—a holy man of God, so they thought—had been violently handled, a shout arose that swelled into

a mighty volume of angry, threatening sounds, a demoniacal fury took possession of them, and before the soldiery could prepare for action a Jew had struck at one of their number. Others followed his example, and the conflict between the two forces—people and soldiers—Jews and Romans—became in the shortest possible space of time terrific. Hoarse cries of rage and pain resounded on all sides; citizens of Jerusalem rushed in to attack the soldiery blindly, and were beaten back only to come again in renewed numbers, and the cries of the procurator for peace and order went unheeded.

Cestus was, to his surprise and pleasure, soon surrounded by his own men, and Phrates, despite his protests, insisted upon placing a sword in his hand, and bade him take charge. Cestus objected on the grounds that he had been deprived of his rank, but Phrates would hear nothing of it, and after a time, when the conflict had been ended in victory for the Roman forces and the procurator had retired into the palace, abandoning the court until later in the day, Cestus marched away with his company to the company room.

“And now that we have thee,” Phrates said, when the men were at ease and had removed the signs of conflict, “not all the army of Cæsar can take thee away again.”

“Unless I choose to go of my own will,” Cestus responded smilingly.

"Thou wouldst not do such an unwise thing," Phrates replied confidently.

"I am a prisoner, my friend Phrates, and must so consider myself until cleared by Pilate. Thou wouldst not have me act dishonorable. A Roman does not run away from a conflict."

"But it is not an honorable conflict," Phrates expostulated. "It was a base, cowardly attack on thy character, without foundation or truth, and thou shalt not again expose thyself to such insults. Think of the company. They cannot do without thee."

"I have thought until my brain turns in the thinking, good Phrates, but I go to Pilate in an hour," and with a mighty grumbling, Phrates turned away in high disgust because of the peculiar notions of honor of his commander.

CHAPTER XI.

"I FIND THIS MAN GUILTY."

PILATE lost little time in calling together an additional guard, and in the course of an hour a strong body of soldiery completely surrounded the palace. Around the place where the court was to be held the guard had been doubled, and the bristling lines of javelins and swords assured him that no further outbreak would be permitted that day. Such was the state of public feeling, however, that he considered it unwise to exclude the people entirely, hence far beyond the compact lines of close-standing soldiers a howling, surging mob spread itself, extending back so far that those in the rear could not possibly tell what was going on in front nor hear the voice of the procurator as he pronounced judgment. The sudden ending of the trial of Cestus and the cause thereof, together with the fact that had become quickly known of his escape, served to whet the interest and curiosity until they could hardly await the opening of the court. Again and again the soldiery found it necessary to beat back the multitude, and time after time fierce but short conflicts were witnessed, all the

strength of the Roman arms being thrown upon the particular spot of trouble until it was quickly subdued, and the fury of the mob vented itself in hoarse, angry mutterings and shouts that reached the ears of the procurator ominously.

After a time, when the patience of the people was well nigh exhausted, Pilate appeared and walked to the bema, taking his seat thereon in dignified silence. Suddenly he raised his head and looked around the circle of rigid soldier forms, and his brows contracted in a frown.

"This is but a continuance of the trial of Cestus," he said to an officer standing by. "Why is he not here? Doth think the people will await his pleasure?"

The officer bowed his head very low, and his face grew ashen with fear.

"Cestus hath escaped, most noble Pilate," he replied tremblingly, "and we know not his whereabouts. Every part of the city hath been searched, but he cannot be found. He made good his opportunity during the riot, and hath disappeared. We beseech thy pardon and beg thy mercy for our failure to hold him, but it was a time of trouble, and other matters were more pressing than the care of a prisoner, even the protection of thy august person."

Pilate's face darkened with rage, and his eye glittered with an evil light. He fixed his gaze full upon

the officer's face and pierced him through with the look.

"So thou wert so careful of the life of thy governor that thou didst think it well to allow the escape of so great a criminal?" he inquired ominously. "I think thy consideration doth deserve much reward, and I will grant it to thee. Wouldst thou prefer the galleys for the term of thy short life, or the sword at once? Take thy choice, thou zealous soul, for thou hast merited the favor."

"Mercy, most high and mighty Pilate," the officer cried mightily, quaking in great fear. "I could not restrain Cestus against so great a mass of people."

"And didst thou try?" Pilate began, but even as he spoke a man, tall and commanding in stature, pushed his way through the lines by sheer force and, having gained the enclosure, stood with folded arms before the procurator, a contemptuous smile curving his mouth and throwing a strange light of defiance over his features.

"A free born Roman doth not run away," he said quietly but in a firm voice, "and I am at thy service. I joined the soldiers of Rome when the people became troublesome, as becometh a soldier of Cæsar."

A murmur of astonished admiration ran over the multitude near enough to hear his words, and it was taken up in a half-understanding way by those behind. Immediately there sprang into the heart of

every soldier in that vast guard surrounding him an unbounded respect and delight in his courage, but the face of the procurator remained cold and impassive.

"It is well," he responded, "but thou shouldst not think to influence the court of justice by the exhibition of mock bravery, since thou dost know thy hiding place would have been found." He turned to the officer to whom he had first spoken. "See thou that he is bound securely so that he escape not a second time."

The officer sprang to Cestus' side and attempted to carry out the order, but the young man drew away from him proudly and raised his hands above his head.

"I have no need for bonds," he said, "and I have spoken. Bind thou the criminal who hath committed a crime, but not the soldier who fears no man when in the right."

His glance was so full of authority and rang so truly that the officer hesitated and looked towards the bema. In reply, Pilate beckoned to another officer to surround Cestus with his men, and this was done, leaving the young man free of arm, but closely guarded.

"Thou art accused, in the second charge, of having trailed the banners of Rome in the dust," he said, after complete quiet had with great difficulty been secured, "and the witnesses against thee are many.

Not only wouldst thou seek to ruin a maiden of Israel and threaten her father with death if he opposed thee, but thou wouldst have disheartened those who were fighting to preserve the peace. How canst thou expect mercy, even though thou art high in authority and position? Is it not the mission of Rome to protect the people?" He spoke loudly, so that he might be heard freely, and shrewdly paused to give his words weight before the people. The throne of the procurator was indeed built upon the sands of public approval, and he knew it well. "I say to thee," he repeated loudly, "how canst thou expect mercy, when thou hast used thine office to obtain thy desires, and hast degraded the high principles of Rome?"

"I ask not mercy," Cestus responded, a proud smile playing over his features, "and nothing from thee but justice. Thou hast taken the word of a man unworthy to testify to the truth, and wouldst believe him against any other evidence. Bring thou the maiden before thee, and ask of her the truth of thy accusation. If she condemns me, I place my life in thy hands willingly. Is it not a just request?"

Pilate appeared to deliberate, but in his heart he had no intention of allowing anything to creep into the trial that might justify or lessen the guilt of the centurion. It was his purpose to convict, and he only wished to find a plausible excuse for so doing without betraying himself. He therefore, after a slight pause, turned to the multitude.

"Hear ye this man," he said. "He would drag before the court an innocent woman and defile her ears with the tale of his passion; he, the trusted, but false, man of Rome. Bring forth the witnesses against him on the charge of treason. I have heard enough of the other side of the case. Thou," pointing to a man standing a little ways aside, "wert nigh when Cestus degraded the banners of Rome. In what manner was it done, and for what reason? Speak!"

The man addressed stepped forward before the procurator.

"Cestus seized the ensigns from the hands of the bearer thereof and threw them on the ground in my presence, most noble Pilate," he replied. Cestus looked at him, and recognized the centurion who had taunted him with treason during the riot. "The manner of doing so was most violent," he continued coolly, "and in defiance of the wishes of all the men of arms who were fighting. Then would he not have arrested the enemies of Cæsar had not others watched him and called out in shame that he do his duty. I was filled with hot anger towards him, and would have engaged him in combat on the instant had he not yielded a half compliance."

"And thou didst see him pull down the ensigns—thou didst not take another's word for such an act?" Pilate inquired, knowing full well what the answer would be, for the witness had been carefully instructed.

"Yea, with mine own eyes," was the reply.

"It is enough," Pilate cried, and rose to his feet. Then before him there passed a host of other witnesses—the young man who had seen the strange reluctance of Cestus to arrest Trypho, a woman who had been near and had seen the ensigns lowered, a soldier who had heard Cestus declare that the Jews were oppressed by Rome, and others with tales surprisingly false, but all accepted by the procurator. At last Cestus spoke, but his face was set, and he knew that no words of his could change the evidence against him.

"To the first charge," he said, "there is no reply, but to deny, since thou wilt not admit the maiden, and I regret now that I at first called for her, as she is too pure of heart to appear before the throng. To the second charge I have only to say that the ensigns were lowered to prevent further innocent bloodshed, and with no intention to degrade the power of Rome. Look into my face and see if thou canst detect the blush of cowardice, most noble Pilate, or the brazen of a liar. Speak to the men of my company, and ask them if on the field of battle I have turned back, or have been disloyal to Cæsar. Thou knowest I have not, and I defy thee to prove to the contrary. But," and his head went erect and his bearing grew more dignified and manly, "thou art determined to hear those who swear falsely, and I ask no favors. As I have lived so shalt thou see a soldier, who fears

not, die. I ask thee to decide quickly, for I am weary of this proceeding."

Pilate answered him not a word, but turned to the multitude and addressed them.

"Ye have heard the evidence, and it only remains for me to grant unto the people of Jerusalem the proper satisfaction for the wrongs they have received at this man's hands. Thus will Rome protect and help her people always, and I call ye to witness that the trial hath been fair and open." He glanced around closely to see what impression his words carried, and met here and there an approving smile, whereupon the throne grew steadier under his feet, and the office rested easier upon his shoulders. "Ye shall see how Rome punishes those who would violate the maidens of Israel."

Cestus heard and understood what the procurator meant. He was to be sacrificed to propitiate the people, and he realized that no word that he might speak could count in his favor. As this thought grew upon him, he changed his position so that he faced the multitude, and with a countenance of perfect calm awaited the judgment that he knew would swiftly follow. And he was not mistaken, for Pilate, fearing that an interruption might take place again, made haste to end the scene.

"As the Governor of Jerusalem, under the jurisdiction of the mighty Cæsar, I find this man guilty of gross defiance of the Jewish laws, and of having

proved a traitor to Rome. Therefore, before the people who were wronged, and before the soldiery who were betrayed, I condemn him to service in the galleys for life, to be taken hence to the prison of the procurator, and thence shortly afterwards to Rome." His eyes glittered with an evil triumph, the more plainly to be seen because he tried to conceal it.

He stood for a moment to give weight to his sentence, and an old man in the crowd whispered to a companion as he looked upon the unmoved face of Cestus:

"He hath not the appearance of guilt, my brother."

"Nay, but who can tell what lieth behind the face of a Roman dog?"

"True!" the old man admitted, and the fierce hate in his heart for whoever wore the garb of Rome stopped his further speaking.

A woman, with her face well concealed, had been standing close to the marble steps of the palace during the trial, and near enough to hear every word that was uttered. The countenance beneath the veil was dark and passionate, and the varying emotions that passed through her heart were clearly reflected thereon, running from rage and despair to the most tender expressions of love and pity. It was Paulina, the fierce-hearted rival of Myria, the woman of wicked heart but strong passions, and she restrained

herself with a great effort from crying out at intervals as the trial proceeded. When Pilate had paused he caught her eye fixed full upon his face, and, in spite of himself, shuddered. The forbidding look in her eyes made him afraid to prolong the trial. Then the next time he looked towards her he noticed a change in her bearing and a look in her eyes that seemed to bid him carry out his purpose. He wondered thereat, but did not know that her sharp eyes had caught sight of another figure standing well back in the crowd, a figure with bowed head and veiled like Paulina, but trembling and shy of contact with those around her. Neither did he know that Paulina, out of all that crowd, had seen and recognized her rival, and that the demon of jealousy had entered her heart in that instant of recognition, and had swept all the softness out of her eyes, leaving instead a glance full of vindictive and awful hate. Pilate was not alone in his ignorance of the tragedy that was being enacted in a woman's heart, for no one in that vast assembly was aware of it. Cestus himself knew not that the woman he loved—his beloved Myria—was so near him, yet not able to thrust herself forward, and the lack of knowledge saved Rome many lives that day, for he would not have consented to stand idly and indifferent to his surroundings. Those immediately around Paulina saw her start when her eyes rested upon the crowd, but they thought it but a shock caused by the swift

judgment that had been given, and pressed their sympathy upon her. This she repulsed without explanation, and in a moment more the procurator had issued an order and the soldiers closed around Cestus, marching away quickly to the prison.

That night in the privacy of her chamber a woman, with tears streaming down her fair cheeks, threw herself upon her knees.

"Oh, thou God of my fathers," she prayed, "spare him from this awful fate, and grant that the right may triumph. I care not to live without him. Show me the way thou wouldst have me go to help him, and by thy great mercy save him. Help me in my distress, and be thou my guide."

While in the palace of the procurator, in the great banquet hall, amid scenes of revelry and splendor, another woman joined with apparent relish and spirit in the mirth around her, but cried in her heart, as she raised the wine glass to her crimson lips:

"The fool, to prefer a simple maiden of the people to me! Cestus, couldst thou not conceal thy heart even before the throng? So, thou wouldst throw me aside for her? And what, thinkest thou, I will have to say as to that?"

Her brow contracted into a deep frown, and a companion noticed her seriousness.

"Why so sorrowful—or angry, I should have said—of countenance, Paulina? Is the wine not to thy taste? What ails thee?"

“It is nothing,” she replied hastily, and with wonderful control of herself laughed gaily. “Nothing but the fumes of the wine, that would fain close mine eyes in slumber.”

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN OF ROME.

AT the close of the day, when darkness crept on apace, a pale moon hung heavily over the city, casting quaint and spectral shadows through the strife-ridden streets, now almost deserted and enjoying the only calm moment in the long, riotous day. The air grew oppressive in its very stillness, and, like the ominous calm that precedes the lightning flash, a hush had fallen upon the soul and conscience of sinful and sinning man.

It was a time when all troubles should have been forgotten in peaceful rest and slumber, but amid all the natural repose and apparent calm of the hour there were watchful eyes ever open, and alert ears ever ready to listen to the slightest vibrations of a motion out of the ordinary, and only too eager to suspect the worst motive for every nocturnal pedestrian who chanced to be abroad. Suspicion indeed lay upon the fair city like a blighting curse, causing a man to suspect his neighbor, a wife her husband, and the lover to doubt his beloved. Treachery was breathed in every whisper of strictest confidence, for

under the guise of friendship many an utterance compromising the power of Rome had been repeated to those in power, followed by swift and indiscriminating punishment, and none knew at what hour a charge would be brought against them, to be seized upon and magnified a thousandfold.

The army of Cæsar slept uneasily, knowing that to-morrow promised nothing in the way of peace, and in his palace the procurator, torn by pangs of conscience and fear, found little rest in slumber.

At the midnight hour the cloaked and muffled figure of a woman stole softly from the palace gates, pausing to gaze around her with frightened eyes before venturing into the street, then, having assured herself that she was not observed, made her way hastily along the deserted thoroughfares. Sleepy and half-awake sentinels, patrolling the principal streets and longing for the time to come when they should be relieved, gazed upon the fleeting form with idle curiosity, but none sought to stop her, being only a woman, and therefore not dangerous. Once she uttered a scream of terror and fled precipitately, for a soldier had stepped in her path, though entirely by accident, and laughed heartily at her fears, calling after her to stop and abide with him for a while, but she gave no heed and quickened her pace into a run.

The prison of Pilate was enveloped in deep gloom when she stood before it, trembling and fearful of apprehension, yet the woman was lion-hearted and

hesitated only for a moment, going rapidly towards the entrance.

A sentry barred her way, and his sword glistened in the chill night air as it was raised threateningly.

"Whither, woman?" he inquired roughly. "Why art thou on the streets at this hour?"

"I go to the prison," she answered briefly, and essayed to pass him by, but again he stepped before her.

"Thy business there, and why dost thou choose such an hour?" He leered in her face impudently. "Wouldst thou go to thy Jewish lover, who is perchance imprisoned? Not a very cheerful place for love, my beauty. Come, it is lonesome and I am sad for company; why shouldst thou seek further? Is not a Roman soldier more to thy liking than a Jewish prisoner? Let me see thy face; I warrant it is sweet, and that thou art no prude." He seized her veil and strove to tear it aside, but she dealt him a stinging blow with her hand, upon which he seized her in his arms and held her. "By my faith," he cried, "but thou art a stiffish jade. Come, let me see thy face; perchance it will release thee."

"Thou speakest well," she replied hotly, releasing herself by a violent effort and standing a little way apart from him. "Not only will my face release me from thine impudence, but will bind thee with fear for daring to stop me. Stand thou aside, or——"

"How now, pretty one?" he interrupted. "Wouldst

thou seek to frighten me, and wilt thou not give a soldier the consolation of thy favor?"

She advanced closer to his side, and suddenly threw her veil away from her face, standing so that the light from his hand lamp was cast thereon. The soldier bent forward in eager anticipation and with a smile on his lips, only to start back aghast.

"Paulina, of the royal household!" he gasped, and sank on his knees. "Thou wilt forgive me this indiscretion; I thought thee but a maiden of the people."

"A word to the procurator would bring about thy ruin," she observed coolly, and he prostrated himself still further.

"But thou wilt be merciful and say nothing to Pilate?" he pleaded. "I meant no harm to thee. The night is cold and dreary, and I was lonesome and friendless. A soldier's duty is not pleasant, and a man cannot always be as virtuous as he should. Mercy, Paulina, most gracious mistress; I beg of thee to say nothing of my fault."

"I grant thee my silence," she said haughtily, "on condition that thou gain me admission to the prison without attracting attention. Canst thou do this?"

A smile of relief broke over his face, and an eager expression followed.

"I can, and with ease," he replied in a low voice, "and it is well thou didst tell me alone of thy desires. Know, then, that I hold the keys to a private

entrance, and can take thee in that way without being seen by any one or having to go through the keeper's room. I guess thy mission to be secret, or thou wouldst not have come at this unseemly hour. Tell me whom thou dost wish to see, and I place myself at thy service, ready to guide thee whithersoever thou wouldst go. I only ask that thou wilt keep the proceeding a secret, or it might imperil my life."

"Thou canst trust me," Paulina responded, gladdened by the news that the soldier had imparted. "I go to see the noble Cestus, who was sent here to-day in galling bonds that ill become such a brave man. I would be conducted to his cell at once, and left there until I shall call for thee. Dost understand?"

"Yea, gracious lady, and I obey willingly." He looked carefully around for possible observers, and, seeing none, continued: "Follow closely, and replace thy veil."

To Paulina's utter surprise, he led her around to the rear of the building and unlocked a door that she did not know existed. All was darkness within, and the soldier carefully extinguished his lamp, only relighting it when they were well off the street. Paulina found herself in a narrow corridor, a part of the cell enclosure, and smelling of the earth. She shuddered and drew her robes around her, the noisome odors of the place almost stifling her the while. He noticed her disgust, and made haste to explain.

"We are just above the underground cells, where

the viler prisoners are kept, and thou wilt not find Cestus there. He hath been placed in a clean apartment on this floor, and I will conduct thee thither on the instant."

She followed him obediently, and directly he stopped before a door and drew back cautiously.

"The cell of Cestus," he announced in an undertone. "I dare not enter with thee for fear of recognition, and the centurion is of so strict a sense of right and wrong that he would consider it his duty to report me. Take thou the key and enter. I wait for thee here, but be not long, as I will be missed from my watch, and those who search may find that I have entered here. My life is in thy hands, fair Paulina; betray it not."

"Have no fear," she replied softly, and without a tremor took the key from his hands and fitted it in the lock.

The door swung open easily at her touch, and with a quick step she passed into the cell. A dim light was burning in one corner, and by its flickering rays she descried a form flung carelessly upon the low couch in the center of the cell—a luxury that was denied prisoners lesser in rank than the young centurion. He had fallen into a light slumber, and did not hear the noise of her entrance. For a moment she stood watching the silent form, and the noble, handsome face upturned to the light caused her heart to beat fiercely with a mad joy. The lines of care

and anxiety were deeply marked upon Cestus' countenance, but in spite of that his manly beauty was unimpaired, and as she gazed upon the athletic figure in silent admiration she felt that her very soul would not pay the price for his love. The woman of the world, the acknowledged courtesan of the court of Pilate, stood awed by the majestic unconsciousness of the man she loved, and presently she moved towards the couch, standing over him, loth to disturb his slumber, then with a passionate cry flung herself by the side of the sleeper and impressed a kiss full of passion upon the silent lips.

Cestus opened his eyes and in a half-dazed condition beheld the woman at his side. Still dreaming of Myria, his beloved, whose image had haunted his slumbers since he first closed his eyes, he clasped his arms around the kneeling figure and drew her closer to him. A long, tremulous sigh broke from her lips as she felt the embrace, and she raised her face to his. A shock passed through Cestus' frame as he saw his mistake, and he hastily released her and arose to his feet.

"Thou, Paulina?" he exclaimed, disappointed beyond measure. "How camest thou here, and why? I thought thee another. What meaneth thy visit at this hour, and how didst thou gain admittance?"

A storm of passionate rage shook the woman in its violence, and her eyes became like live coals of fire.

Her bosom rose and fell spasmodically, and her breathing became labored.

"So, thou didst mean thine embraces for another," she cried wildly, "and that other the pale, sickly Jewish maiden that hath made thee mad! Thou, the valiant and unscathed soldier of Rome, to lose thy senses over a woman who hath naught but water in her veins! Shame on thee, that thou shouldst allow others to see this new foolishness of thine. Is not all Jerusalem talking of thy infatuation, and laughing because of thy bravery in trying to seduce so humble a maid?"

"Stop!" he commanded imperiously, raising his figure to its full height. "Not another word. Thou canst say what thou wilt of me, and I care not, but of her thou shalt be silent. Her name is sacred, and cannot be breathed by thee."

A repellant, haughty smile passed over Paulina's face.

"I will say what pleaseth me," she replied, "and am not to be frightened by thy words. Sacred indeed! Is not her name bandied about the streets as a jesting word by those who saw thine act in carrying her so gallantly in thine arms? Can she be virtuous, thinkest thou, and allow thee such liberty? Sacred! By all the gods, if thou wilt but pardon the language, thou art a fit subject for mirth, most noble Cestus. What can this woman—this religious fanatic, who worships a strange god and declares

there are no others—be to thee, thou worshipper of the sacred Isis and the gods of Rome? Wouldst thou have me believe that thou are of virtuous intent towards her? Nay, I know thee well, Cestus; thou art too fond of pleasure to care for her. Wouldst thou become a Jew, and join the worship in their synagogues? Thou wouldst make a most devout and solemn fanatic, with thy face lengthened and thine eyes gleaming with the unquenchable thirst for pleasure that is thine.”

She laughed cynically, and he regarded her with cold disdain.

“All that thou hast said doth not move me,” he replied. “It only proves that thou art of a jealous disposition, and would reach with thy tongue those beyond thy power to harm.” He raised his head and looked into her face with chilling reserve. “Is it to say this that thou hast come to me at such an hour? Truly, I gave thee credit for better thoughts.”

“Nay, it was not to speak of her that I came,” she said, her form quivering with suppressed emotion that could hardly be restrained; “but to do thee a service, and it is thus thou wouldst receive a friend. Shall I take my leave without informing thee of thy danger?”

“As thou wilt,” carelessly, “since thy warning would bear the stamp of untruth. Thou canst not be offended, Paulina, for thou hast not cared to con-

ceal thy character in times past. How, then, dost thou expect me to believe thee?"

"I make no claim to goodness," she replied vehemently, "neither do I say long prayers in public that the unrighteous may look on in awe. Virtue! Wouldst thou of all men have to do with it, thou of Rome? I know it not, and care for it less, and I make no concealment, but I do not lie to thee. I came to save thy life and give thee back to the world, because I——"

She hesitated, and Cestus stepped closer to her side.

"Speak!" he said. "For what reason art thou of a sudden so generous?"

She bowed her head for a moment, then lifted her hands to him and sank on her knees at his side.

"Because I love thee—I love thee," she cried passionately, "and I cannot see thee die. Thy growing fondness for this maiden of Israel hath driven me mad! Canst thou not see what is in my heart for thee, Cestus? Thou art my beloved—mine by every right—and I claim thee as mine own. Strike me if thou wilt, but still my love for thee grows stronger. Despise me, and I throw myself at thy dear feet in humble adoration, seeking only the crumbs of affection that must fall from thy lips when thou dost see my passion. Speak to me, my Cestus, and tell me thou dost not despise me for thus declaring myself. I will not submit——"

He raised his hand and moved away from her, but the passionate flow of words could not be checked.

"I will not submit to this coldness," she repeated wildly, "and thou shalt not desert me for this pale fool—this woman who cannot love thee as thou dost deserve. I will not, I tell thee!"

"Hast thou no sense of maidenly shame, Paulina?" he asked, looking at her coldly, but with a feeling of great pity in his heart.

"Shame—maidenly shame? Dost thou think shame could abide with me for long, Cestus, I, who have thrown myself at thy feet unsought? Shame! I know no depths too low for me now. Modesty hath never been a virtue in my possession, and I care not. But thou, Cestus, my beloved, tell me that thou art not angry because I have spoken so plainly of my feelings for thee. I could stand it no longer. Turn not thine eyes away from me or I perish for want of thy love."

He walked to where she still knelt, and raised her gently by the hand.

"Kneel not to me, Paulina," he said pityingly, and she winced at the tone in his voice. "I think it no dishonor for thee to love; it is the only thing belonging to the gods left upon the earth, and thou shouldst not be ashamed. Arise and cast this passion out of thy heart. I would not wound thee, but my heart is not thine, and never can be."

The look of pleading in her eyes died slowly out,

and in its place blazed a light of wounded pride, and like a tigress ready to spring upon its prey, she arose.

"I want not thy pity or compassion," she exclaimed, the color leaving her cheeks, and a frozen smile playing over her features. "So thou dost reject my love, and dost presume to pity my folly in loving thee? Have a care, Cestus, thou most valiant of men; thou hast not yet tasted of a woman's hate, and it is but a step from deepest love to darkest and most deadly hate—but the slight change of a fleeting hour. Thinkest thou I will let this woman step between us? Nay, thou knowest me too well! I came to bring thee news and offer thee thy life. Now thou canst have the news, and still die like the brave soldier thou art. This very night, while in the hall of banqueting, I overheard a conversation between the procurator, thine enemy, and one of his officers. Thou wert condemned to pass thy life in the galley, but Pilate hath changed his mind and would grant thee a more fitting fate. Ah!" as he started and looked at her wonderingly, "that interests thee? It is the intention of the procurator to lead thee to the death five days hence, thus deceiving the people by the grand spectacle of a soldier dying like a common murderer. Truly a master stroke on Pilate's part, Cestus; and what will thy Myria say when she beholds thee cold in death? Will she love thee then, thinkest thou? Thou hast rejected my suit; take thou the consequences, most valiant soldier."

Beyond the quick start of surprise the news had caused, no change had taken place in Cestus' face. Instead of being agitated, as she had expected, he was calm and, as ever, contemptuous of the fate that awaited him.

"It is well!" he replied coldly. "Better death a thousand times than the degradation of the galleys, the unmanning labor of a slave. Thou hast brought me welcome news, good Paulina, and I thank thee most heartily. Hast thou anything further of a cheering nature to offer?"

A look of deep disappointment crept into the woman's eyes.

"If it be pleasant to thee to know, Cestus," she replied with a malignant glance, "that I hold in my hands the way of release for thee, and because thou art mad over this woman will not give it to thee, be assured of that fact. See thou this key?" She held it up and he looked on indifferently. "It will open the doors of the prison and thou canst escape while it is yet dark. Think well; wilt thou accept it from my hands and bestow thy heart with the acceptance, or wilt thou be true to thy foolishness and give thyself to Myria?" A fine scorn rang in her voice and an eager look showed in her eyes. "I offer thee life and love, when nothing is before thee but death; I open the doors for thee at thy command. Speak!"

She watched the expression of his face eagerly,

hoping to find therein a sign of yielding, a hope that was as vain as happiness to her.

"Thy favors are too high in price, Paulina," he said, turning away his head to hide his contempt. "If this is all thou hast to say to me, our interview is at an end. Leave me; the hour is late."

"But I cannot leave thee to die, Cestus, my beloved!" she cried entreatingly. "Why shouldst thou throw thy life away for this woman who loves thee not? Is it not common talk that she loves Malchus——"

"It is a lie, by whatever tongue uttered!" Cestus interrupted angrily. "She cares nothing for him, and I will hear no more of thy talk. Fare thee well, Paulina."

"Nay, but thou shalt hear me," she insisted, her voice lowering to a caressing tone that stung him to the quick, "because I speak the truth. She loves Malchus, the Jew, and all the city knows it but thou. Thine eyes are closed towards her, and it is well, for thou wouldst behold her imperfections. Love thee, indeed! Dost think a Jewess could love a Roman soldier—one of the hated oppressors—the dogs of Gentiles, as they most kindly call us? Thy good sense tells thee better, Cestus, and thy temporary madness will pass away. Therefore will I not take my dismissal from thy lips so easily. Thou art not thyself—thy nerves are unstrung and thy heart warped by the happenings of the last few days. Who

can blame thee for thinking thyself in love with this piece of marble—this frozen semblance of a woman? Nay, I take not my dismissal so easily, dear heart, and again press upon thee thy liberty to depart with me from this place. Think well before thou dost speak, Cestus; I cannot always be patient, though I love thee with every pulsation of my heart. None shall know of the manner of thy going, and thy justification can be easily accomplished through a higher power from Rome. Think—think, my Cestus, and let not thy blindness lead thee into dangers which thou canst avoid. I would not have thee die, but as the gods live, I——”

“I have thought, and have bidden thee farewell,” he again interrupted. “I blush for thee that thou shouldst so lower thyself as to plead for that which is not of woman’s seeking. I cannot love thee, and can accept nothing at thy hands, not even life. Thou shouldst know me better, Paulina. Leave me; thy presence in this place is unseemly.”

She shrank from him like a whipped animal, and clenched her hands tightly together, the color mounting to her cheeks in a flow of crimson shame. A moment passed in utter silence while he stood looking at her; then she arose and threw her head erect, her dark eyes aflame with a new light, and the blaze that shot forth illuminated her face with its terrible hatred.

“Not even thy life shall suffice to pay for this,”

she cried in towering passion; "thou shalt feel the most exquisite tortures that can be invented to harass thy soul and make thee wish for death a thousand times over. Mark thou my word, Cestus; a woman's heart cannot be so easily cast aside, and there are no depths of infamy to which she would not gladly plunge for the sake of sweet revenge. Listen, thou valiant soldier, and quake before my words. To-morrow all Jerusalem shall know of my visit to thy cell in the night, and shall believe that thou didst send for me to come to thee secretly."

"Thou wouldst not dare to circulate such a lie," he exclaimed hotly.

"Dare!" she echoed. "Doth a woman count the costs? Nay, thou shalt see how thy reputation will stand under the report. And what will thy Myria say when she hears that thou didst entertain another woman in thy cell so secretly while professing to love her alone? Will she be so innocent as to think I came as a friend?" She laughed almost fiendishly, and he glared upon her as though he would strike her to the ground. "Speak, most noble Cestus," she repeated; "what will Myria think of thy constancy when she knows thee guilty of an intrigue with another woman, and that thou wert alone with her at night?"

"She will not believe thee," Cestus answered stoutly, "and I fear thee not. Thou canst not so lie

about me without injuring thyself. It would cost thee thy position at court."

"My position at court! Know thou that the lower part of the Jewish hell would not turn me from my purpose. When the day hath come I will seek thy Myria—thy adorable virgin—and breathe into her ear that thou dost love me, informing her that I have spent many hours of the night with thee at thy request, taking care to add the most exquisite detail that must prove of great torture to her if she love thee. Then will she cast thee out of her heart, and thou canst not defend thyself, from prison. Ah! thou shalt taste of a woman's hate, thou who careth so little for a woman's love that thou wouldst crush it under foot. But, if I mistake not, Myria will but enjoy the tale, and——"

Cestus strode towards her and raised both hands in a threatening attitude, then remembering himself, bowed his head.

"If thou wert a man," he said, "I would receive thy words in a different manner, but, though hardly worthy of the name, thou art a woman, and I cannot touch thee. Cease thy words and take not again the name of Myria on thy lips, lest I forget thy sex. Go!"

He pointed imperiously towards the door, and she obeyed the master tone in his voice. Once she paused and looked at him imploringly, but his face gave no sign of relenting, and she went on, closing the door

behind her and locking it carefully; then, regaining her composure, bade the officer who was waiting outside to take her out of the place.

Cestus slept no more that night, but was tortured by thoughts of what the morrow might bring forth. He knew Paulina would keep her word, and would seek Myria as soon as she could, and after thinking the matter over, he believed she would not hesitate to sacrifice herself to ruin him. He tried to think of some plan to warn Myria of her coming and to tell her not to believe the worst of him, but the way seemed blocked, and the night wore on in miserable uncertainty. The thought of coming death troubled him not at all, and dawn found him still tortured in mind over what Myria would think when she heard Paulina's story.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAIDEN OF ISRAEL.

PAULINA had made the somewhat natural mistake of supposing Myria to be weak in character because she was of a quiet disposition and possessed a purity that the woman of Rome had not known since her early childhood. A certain sneering contempt for virtue was ever noted in the bearing of the latter, experience in the ways of her own countrywomen having given her a perverted idea of the morality of all the human race. And a certain feeling of jealousy because of Myria's natural sweetness of disposition, which gave her friends by the score, made Paulina, herself fallen and knowing her own degradation, hate her.

But, instead of weakness of character, Myria's repose and poise was due to the strong self-control she possessed, beneath which there beat a heart full of high courage and resolution—a heart as sensitive as the tenderest plant, as pure as the heavens above, and as strong and deep in its passion as eternity. There was no weak point about her, and those who knew her well realized this and loved her for it.

Her affections were deeply entwined around her father—the venerable and respected Trypho, who was beloved by all Jerusalem, and his supposed death had come upon her as a great trial; but the remarkable fortitude, the high-pitched courage that was her natural right, gave her strength to bear up against it.

There is a chord in a woman's heart, however, that is peculiarly responsive to the touch of love—a chord that vibrates strongly at the slightest pulsation beating against it, causing the most acute suffering or the most esthetic joy, as the conditions may warrant, and no one has ever been able to explain it. Therefore her father's death, though bringing untold grief, had not caused her the strong and agonizing mental suffering she felt when she realized that Cestus had been convicted. Her heart—her very nature—cried out against the unjustness of the proceeding. True, she had been in the crowd at the trial, but so far back that she could not hear the evidence against him—so far away, indeed, that she knew nothing of what was going on in front except that he was being tried, and though she fought with all her strength to get closer, to be able to encourage him with the knowledge of a friendly presence, she had been rudely thrust aside, and without being recognized or respected on account of her sex, had only known after he had been led away that he was convicted. No one had breathed to her that he was accused on her account.

And in the seclusion of her home, rendered sacred by the hand of death that had invaded its portals, no further word reached her, the dawn of the following morning finding her with sleepless, grief-stricken eyes and a constitution wearied to the point of exhaustion because of the long night's vigil.

The day was in its new birth when the figure of a man crossed the threshold, bringing with him an air of triumph that chilled her heart before she had heard him speak. It was Malchus, and his face shone with an expression of deep-seated gratification and cunning delight.

"I greet thee, Myria, thou flower of the morning," he exclaimed with suave pleasantry as she came forward to meet him. "The past day hath seen an act of justice, and thou shouldst be proud of thy people to bring about such mighty results. Think what it means to have a Roman soldier punished for transgressing the Jewish laws! It is a new departure for Rome."

She disregarded the sneer in his voice.

"What have they done with Cestus?" she inquired eagerly.

"What, but send him to prison, where he belongs!" Malchus replied, unable to conceal his delight, and his face broadened into a malicious smile. "Thou canst see the truth of my words to thee. He is not fit for thy company, my sweet one."

"I heard it said in the multitude of yesterday that

thou didst testify against him," she cried indignantly, "and that thy testimony was of a personal nature. What subtle argument didst thou use to carry thy point, and how canst thou know anything not to his credit—thou the associate of priests and the godly men of the land? How is it that thou didst lay aside thine office to injure a fellow man? Speak! I would have the tale from thine own lips."

"I but told the truth, Myria," he replied softly, and with a smile that was full of insinuating sweetness. "Cestus hath been guilty of many crimes against the Law of Moses, among them the tempting of many of the maidens of Israel. Shall I horrify thy soul with the recital? It is not right that thou shouldst pollute thine ears with the hearing of such things. Suffice it to say that he hath met only justice and will suffer for his crimes." He lowered his voice and tried to approach her, but she shrank from him. "Myria," he continued, "why shouldst thou continue to let thy thoughts dwell upon him? He is unworthy of thy affection, and I, an Israelite, beg thee for the favor thou dost bestow upon a dog of Rome. Look upon me. I am not uncomely, and would fain protect thee from all the storms of life if thou wouldst place thy hand within mine own. I have desired thee with all my heart, and have not thought thee indifferent. I love thee——"

She had allowed him to speak with increasing fervor for very shame and surprise—shame that he

should think her capable of listening to his pleading, and surprise that he should presume to so address her. But the proud nature could stand it no longer, and she interrupted him fiercely.

“Cease thy words,” she cried, her face crimson with indignation. “I cannot and will not hear thee. Thy language is insulting, and if thou dost continue I will bid thee go hence at once. I asked thee for news of Cestus—he whom thou hast caused to suffer unjustly. Tell me of him! To what fate hath he been consigned, and would they murder him as they did my father? Speak!”

His brow instantly darkened with jealous rage—a passion that he quickly subdued, for the prey appeared to be so easily within his grasp and he would not ruin his chances by haste.

“I will answer thee,” he replied; “but calm thyself and grieve not. Cestus hath been condemned to the galleys for life. Think of it, Myria—the galleys, a most degrading form of slavery for the proud Roman soldier, the man thou wouldst trust so blindly! It is surely a fitting punishment, and I honor the procurator for his judgment. Can’st thou not see the hand of the Jews in this thing? Would he have condemned unless he had feared the people? Thou shouldst be proud of thy people.”

“The galleys for life—for life!” she repeated, trying to fix the horror of it upon her mind, and he saw her face blanch with a deadly fear. The tender heart

within her was suffering an agony of grief and despair, and he knew it. Presently she raised her head, and a strong resolution shone in her eyes. "It shall not be!" she cried bravely; "it shall not be! I will go to Pilate and demand his release!"

A great fear grew upon him at her words.

"Thou shalt not!" he declared. "I would rather see thee dead than to expose thyself to Roman persecution, and such would be thy fate shouldst thou go to Pilate. He will not believe thee."

"If thy witness was true what can it matter to thee that I go?" she asked quickly, shrewdly guessing that in some way he feared her going more than he would say.

"His conviction was because of treason to Rome, and that alone," he answered with a ready lie; "therefore would it avail thee nothing to go to the procurator with thy demand." He approached and looked down into her face threateningly, and she returned the look undaunted. "As the accredited representative of the priesthood, I command thee, a maiden of Israel, to keep away from the procurator with thy complaints. See that thy obedience be sure."

An expression of bold defiance crossed her face, and she stood before him resolutely.

"And I recognize not thy right to command me," she declared. "I have been faithful to the religion of my fathers, and have observed all of the laws of

Moses, yet I say to thee that in this matter only my heart and conscience shall guide me. I shall not speak to thee again on the subject or ask thy advice. Fare thee well, Malchus."

"And I say to thee," he cried angrily, "that thou shalt not go to the Roman Governor with thy complaint. Is not the priesthood thy proper channel for redress? If thou dost desire, I will go to Pilate for thee and say whatsoever thou wilt to him, thereby bringing more weight to bear upon thy statement."

"I trust thee not," she replied, looking him steadfastly in the eye. "Thou wouldst give thy sanction to a second murder, thinking it thy duty as against the Romans."

He paused a moment, as if to consider her words, but in reality to give his next statement full weight—a bit of news that he had reserved for the last, and he waited until her vehement anger had died out and her eyes had resumed their expression of calmness. Then, with a sneering expression on his face, spoke. He had made an early visit to the prison.

"If I prove to thee that this Cestus hath deceived thee wilt thou then renounce him?"

"Yea, but thou can'st not do so!"

"Yea, but I can! Did he not tell thee that thy father was dead? Ah!" as her face lit up with a newborn hope, and she bent towards him eagerly, "that would serve to change thy mind towards Cestus! I tell thee, Myria, that he hath deceived thee.

Thy father is alive, and, if the signs fail not, will live for many years. I learned of this but this morning, and hastened to thee with the news. It is thus thou wouldst receive thy friends."

"Thank God!" she exclaimed fervently, sinking to her knees and raising her hands in grateful adoration on high. "Thank God for this mercy." Her tears flowed silently, and he watched her unmoved.

"And are there no thanks due to me, Myria?"

"Thou wert the messenger, and I thank thee!" she replied sweetly. "It hath raised my heart, and I thank thee again." A sudden thought seemed to strike her as she spoke. "If he be not dead, then is Cestus guiltless of wrong."

He uttered an imprecation in spite of himself; the news had not resulted as he had thought it would, and his face grew dark and malignant.

"Always thinking of that dog of a Roman," he muttered to himself. Then, aloud: "Such thoughts ill become thee, Myria. The restoration of thy father should drive all other affection from thy heart."

"Go!" she exclaimed, "and leave me to my joy, that I may bring the welcome news to my sorrowing mother. Go, in mercy!"

Afraid to remain any longer—some unknown feeling agitating his breast that made him a coward for the moment, he walked out of the room and went his way, while a woman still knelt and poured out her heart to the God who hears, in silent thankfulness and

worship, arising after a few moments and hastily seeking her mother to gladden her heart.

Malchus had not proceeded very far when he met a woman hurrying towards the gate of the Valley of Jehosaphat—Myria's home. He recognized her instantly as Paulina, the woman who had served him more than once by influence at court.

"Whither?" he inquired.

"To see Myria," she replied, and with the quickness of lightning he understood her mission.

"It is well! Thou wilt find her enlivened by the news of her father being alive. I cannot promise thee much success, if, as I surmise, thou wouldst discourage her with Cestus."

"Thou canst not promise success," she replied shrewdly, "but it will please thee much if my mission be not in vain. I know thy secret, friend Malchus. A woman can see the signs of love where they are concealed from a man. I wish thee much joy with Myria, and go to prepare thy way."

"Thou art indeed a woman used to the trickery of love," he replied smilingly, "and woe to the man who would disappoint thee; it would go hard with him. But what of thy excuse for visiting Myria? Will she not ask the reason?"

"Trust a woman to coin a lie on the moment. I shall easily convince her that I am of a friendly purpose. Trouble not thyself."

"If thou shouldst have need of an excuse," he

said, bending towards her and whispering, "say that thou hast come from the court and bring her the news of her father's being alive."

"Trypho alive!" she exclaimed. "How will it fare with thee now—after thy testimony. Thou canst not mean to say that it was the truth thou didst speak."

"Even so," he affirmed, but she laughed incredulously, and he saw that it was futile to try to convince her. "Any way, if thou shouldst have need of an excuse remember her father."

"As thou hast remembered him, for thine own purposes," mockingly.

"What matter the means so the end be obtained?"

"Surely; and what matter death so that life be lived in a glorious dream of love? Thou and I are friendly enemies, Malchus. We know what dependence can be placed in the other when personal interest doth concern; but I trust thee not, otherwise. Is it not so?"

"Yea and nay," he began, but she interrupted him with a careless, cynical laugh.

"Use not thy good supply of vain and pleasant words upon me; they would but fall upon barren grounds, for I know thee," and with a mocking glance upon his passionate, sin-beclouded face, she walked away, only to turn around when out of sight and look in his direction with a vindictive frown upon her countenance.

"And if Cestus doth suffer because of thy lies, look well to thine own head."

CHAPTER XIV.

“WHAT MEANEST THOU?”

“I THANK thee for the news of my father being alive,” Myria replied, after Paulina had told her the supposed object of her visit, “but in truth another hath forestalled thee and brought the welcome tidings, even Malchus.”

“Hath he indeed been here so early?” Paulina exclaimed with affected surprise. “But I wonder not at his haste, for what man would throw away an excuse to visit at thy house, and Malchus, according to report, is especially favored. I think thy taste, my good Myria, very excellent that thou shouldst prefer such a man to the rest of the frivolous throng. He is one of thine own race and of irreproachable character.”

“I understand thee not at all,” Myria replied. “Why dost thou think that Malchus is especially welcome here; why he more than others? I like the man very little, and would rather thou wouldst not mention his name.”

Pauline laughed in a superficially shrewd manner. She had, before coming, determined upon her plan

of action, and meant to make Myria believe that she thought her in love with Malchus, an idea that would have appeared ridiculous to her at any other time, knowing the man as she did. But the woman was an adept in deception, and the play of her features revealed nothing of what was passing through her mind.

"Surely!" she cried laughingly, "and I would not care to talk of my lover to thee, therefore can I not blame thee for wishing to shield him. But I only praise him, Myria, and that cannot displease thee. He is a good man, of excellent appearance and most thoroughly honorable. Why shouldst thou care to hide thy feelings from me, a woman who hath loved almost to her soul's destruction, and who would help others to obtain the nectar of the gods, even the love of the adored one. Come, confess thy passion and ease my mind."

Myria looked her steadfastly in the eye.

"I do not think Malchus even a friend," she replied, "and for that reason I would have thee not use his name. I do not care to talk of such things," coldly, "and if thou wouldst please me, say no more about him."

"As thou wilt. I meant not to offend, but it is common report, and I thought to tell thee of what is being said. As for myself, I consider him a good man, very much unlike the men of Rome, even though I, a woman of Rome, do say such a thing.

Dost thou know why I visited thee, Myria—that is, what other object I had than to tell thee of thy father?"

"Nay," Myria responded; "I thought thou didst come for that alone."

"Not so, but to see thee with mine own eyes. Could I not have sent a messenger to thee with the tidings? But I would look upon thee in person. For what, thinkest thou? Because thy beauty hath set half the men of Rome in the city of Jerusalem talking about thee, and because I was jealous of thy charms and wished to see for myself." She tried to throw into her voice a tone of good-natured criticism and raillery, but there was a curious ring of angry truth that crept to the surface unawares. Her face was smiling, but her soul was in a torment of hate. Such is the power of a deceptive woman. "And of all the things that are said about thee," she continued, "none approach close to the truth, for thou art beautiful—yea, divinely beautiful and fascinating. Wert thou of Rome, Myria, thou couldst have the world at thy feet, instead of only being allowed a Jewish lover—only a man who is of thy faith. But I bid thee beware of our men; they are not unmindful of thy charms, and therein lieth thy danger. Already thou hast caused much trouble amongst us by thy beauty."

"I thank thee!" Myria replied sweetly, and innocently conscious that the truth of her beauty had

been told. There was in the high-minded girl not a trace of conceit or vanity, but she did not underestimate her own advantages. "I think it the duty of every woman to be as pleasing to the eye as possible; therefore am I glad to know that I have pleased. But perhaps thou art unjust to the men of thy country. Are there not many beautiful women in Rome?"

"Surely, but of a different type. Hast thou not learned that men crave the unattainable, and that a woman ceases to be attractive when she is too easily conquered?" She spoke somewhat bitterly, and Myria gazed upon her in great surprise. "I have told thee to beware of the men of Rome, and my warning should not fall upon thine ears unheeded, for thou hast had an experience with one of them—Cestus."

Myria conquered her feelings by a strong effort; she would not let this woman know her heart.

"He hath been falsely accused," she said simply, "and hath been guilty of no wrong. I do not understand thy reference to my experience with him."

It was Paulina's time to be surprised. She had not thought it possible that Myria could be ignorant of the fact that Cestus had been accused of trying to wrong her, but from Myria's remark the truth burst upon her mind. A chance to involve Malchus so that he would have trouble explaining instantly presented itself to her fertile imagination. Evidently, he had

not told Myria of his part in witnessing against Cestus, that he knew him to be guilty of attempted seduction. He loved Myria, and for that reason had concealed the fact from her, trusting that it would not be made known. It was a sweet thought to Paulina that she could cause the Jew some trouble, and at the same time further her own designs by creating enmity between the two.

"Dost thou then think that Cestus was condemned because of treason alone?" she replied meaningly. "Other things were brought up against him, far greater in wrong from the standpoint of thy religion than treason. Would Pilate have condemned him if the Jews had not pressed him so hard so to do?"

"But what other charge was there against him? Thou dost surprise me! Was it not enough to accuse him of treason?"

"Nay, not enough for thy people. They would heap accusations upon him until Pilate could do naught but condemn. I cannot tell thee of the other charge; that task is for one of thine own race. Ask thou Malchus. He was one of the witnesses, and can tell thee everything thou wouldst know."

Myria's face for a moment was suffused with a look of passionate resentment, but changed instantly to an expression of resolve and determination. Paulina looked her amazement at the girl's composure, and wondered at her self-restraint. Here was more character and courage than she had expected to find

in this "piece of marble—this frozen semblance of a woman," as she had so malignantly and ignorantly termed her but a few hours since.

"I have asked Malchus for the truth," Myria declared firmly, "but he would not enlighten me, therefore I go to Pilate ere the day is closed. I will demand of him, and he will not dare to deny."

Pauline was for a moment lost in thought. Would it be the best thing for Myria to go to Pilate, or demand an explanation from Malchus? Either way appeared to answer her purpose, however, and presently she tried to assume an expression of great sympathy.

"I am truly sorry for thee, Myria," she said, "because thou didst allow thy fair name to be used in connection with that of Cestus, who only thought of thy beauty, and not of thy purity. I knew him well in Rome, where he was the gayest of the gay, the freest of the free, and the most licentious man wearing the uniform of Cæsar. I can speak no good word of him except that he was merry, fond of a woman's company and regardless of virtue and chastity." She saw with great delight that her words were torturing Myria, though her face remained calm and impassive. "I know the prejudice of thy race against such things," she continued; "but in Rome we think nothing of them, and I, a weak woman, know it only too well. Virtue is a name that means nothing—absolutely nothing, though I confess it

with great shame. But why should we, who believe not in punishment after death, as thy religion teaches, cast away from us the pleasures of life—an existence far too short for satiety?”

“Thou didst know Cestus in Rome?” Myria asked in a constrained voice. “What was he to thee?”

“Oh, the merest nothing!” Paulina affirmed with a cynical laugh full of insinuating mirth; “only a lover! A trifle not to be considered, Myria, in Rome—indeed, not so serious a matter as in Jerusalem. But the noble Cestus did not cease his love making when he came to this city; in fact, it seemed to increase, but I could not look upon his advances with great favor because of the sharp eyes of thy people upon us continually. A pretty scandal would it be for the willing tongues of the multitude to roll around as a choice morsel. Nay, we of the palace must be careful with our affairs of love, else would be in great trouble therefrom. But Cestus was under most unwilling restraint, and made many objections. He is a persistent fellow, and knows how to reach a woman’s heart quickly. Did he not cause thee, a woman of Israel, a natural enemy of Rome, to believe in him until thou didst by chance find him out? Thou’rt fortunate, Myria.”

A flash of fire entered the eyes of the Jewish girl, and a half-cynical smile rested upon and around her beautiful mouth. Paulina, looking on, knew that she had met a dangerous rival; felt instinctively that

this apparently frail creature was possessed of a soul far too deep for her to fathom.

"I wish to understand thee thoroughly," Myria said coldly. "Dost thou mean that he hath been thy lover up to this time, and hath not departed from thee? How is it that thou wouldst accept a lover so tainted with vice as thou hast pictured Cestus? Would he not deserve thy condemnation and reproach, and wouldst thou not cast him from thee in shame?"

"By all the power of Rome but thou'rt innocent!" Paulina exclaimed in uneasy jocularity. "Why should the wicked care for further pollution, and will not the jackal seek its mate? I claim no goodness, and would not reproach Cestus for his wickedness, but when he is guilty towards Rome, then do I think it time to reject his advances. Therefore, when he did send for me last night to come to him at the prison I considered long before going, and——"

"Thou wert with Cestus at the prison last night?" Myria questioned incredulously, her face crimsoning with shame at the bare suggestion. "Thou with him, and upon his request?"

"Yea," Paulina replied carelessly, but watching with every sense alert the expressions that passed over Myria's face—a baffling and unsatisfactory task. "Why should that surprise thee, since I have told thee of our intimacy? Not only did he send for me to come, but reproached me for my tardiness, and

would not let me go for several hours. What is there in such a visit to offend thy views of right and wrong? Surely thou canst not mean to quarrel with me over the possession of his affections, for I know thou dost care nothing for him. And, even if thou didst by chance love him—which I think impossible, as thou art cold towards the men of Rome—it would avail nothing, and mean less to either one of us, for his days are numbered, as thou wilt soon hear.”

“What meanest thou?” Myria inquired, her composure giving away for a moment under the terrible insinuation of the Roman woman. “Is he not condemned to the galleys for life, and doth that not mean that he can escape at some future time?”

“That was the sentence as passed upon him by Pilate yesterday, but he is a man of many moods, and to-day he thirsts for blood to satisfy the people. Therefore is Cestus condemned to be executed as a common criminal, and hath not many days to live. But trouble not thyself, Myria, he is not worthy of a thought of thine. Would he not have deceived thee?”

The two women faced each other—one with a hardened, empty smile upon her face, with a world of malignant pleasure in her eyes and trying to assume a careless expression, as though she cared nothing for the coming death of the young centurion; the other calm, resolute and self-restrained, not afraid to show her interest in the news, but determined that the

bearer should not know what it cost her to maintain control of her features. In the brief space of time that followed Paulina's announcement, and before Myria had spoken, they understood each other—understood that they had nothing in common, and Myria comprehended like a flash that Paulina's sole purpose in coming to her had been to talk of and denounce Cestus, instead of to bring the news of her father. In the same instant all deception was laid aside, and the sharp eyes of the pure-minded Jewish girl looked through the soul of the Roman woman and saw the vileness lurking there, discerned that beneath her denunciation of Cestus a deep-seated love was buried. The woman's heart was laid bare to her gaze; she was trying to remove all obstacles from her path by denouncing the object of her affections to others. A deep revulsion of feeling took place in Myria's breast, and a feeling of shame that Cestus could have stooped so low as to associate with this woman took possession of her. Yet, in spite of her abhorrence, she could not bring herself to doubt that Cestus had really been all that the woman had said. Was he not a Roman, and would he not seek one of his own countrywomen? Indeed, had he not already been accused by other persons of being a votary of pleasure? She read Paulina's character aright, but the disgust she felt brought with it no assurance that Cestus was innocent. What, she thought, more natural than that this woman of Rome, believing her to

be a rival, should try to discourage her by speaking ill of Cestus. For what other purpose could she have come—she who had never before entered the house under any pretext whatsoever?

The announcement of the doom of Cestus shocked her and caused her to clench her hands until the blood started beneath the fair skin, but the spirit was strong within her, and she would not betray her feelings, though her heart cried out against the suppression. A brave, noble courage enabled her to keep her countenance in perfect repose, and Paulina was visibly disappointed. She had expected Myria to break into passionate weeping at the very mention of the impending fate.

"I am grieved to hear of the decision," Myria responded, "and I think it unjust. Of course, I do not know the law, but it is cruel to visit death on so young a man. Is there no chance for him?"

"I fear not," Paulina replied, puzzled by the extreme unconcern in Myria's voice; "I thought it would interest thee to know, but it doth not seem to stir thy sympathies very strongly."

"I do sympathize with Cestus, but I much fear my sorrow will not help him. If what thou hast told me is true, thine eyes should not be dry in the telling of such news."

A glare of anger shone in Paulina's eyes, and she did exactly what she had been trying to avoid all through the interview—lost her temper, and with it

her power to smile hypocritically. She bent upon Myria a look of virulent hatred, her form quivering with passion and rage.

“What is that to thee?” she cried coarsely, forgetting at once the polish she had assumed for the occasion. “Dost thou think me a sniveling idiot to cry mine eyes out for a man? But if I did, is it thy concern? I would rather possess a fount of tears than to be like thee—a block of coldest marble and utterly incapable of feeling. So thou didst think to make Cestus love thee, thou fool. Can the drinker of costly wines prefer water? Love thee, indeed! Thou shouldst be glad to attract one of thine own race—a meek, lowly and deceitful Jew, rather than raise thine eyes to a noble Roman like Cestus. Love thee!” She tried to laugh sarcastically, but the effort ended in a fresh outburst of rage. The mask had fallen. “Cestus cares not for thee, I tell thee,” she affirmed, “and thou art more than fool to expect it. Didst thou think to deceive me by thine indifference? Again, I say thou art——”

Myria arose to her feet majestically, her pure face unchanged and no trace of excitement in her bearing.

“If thy visit is ended,” she said calmly, “I will ask thee to leave me. Enough hath been said.”

“Nay, not enough by half,” Paulina cried, enraged beyond measure, “and I will tell thee further that Cestus only cared for thy beauty of form, and

would have possessed thee while his heart was mine. That had much to do with his condemnation. I would scorn to deny him the pleasure, and——”

But one word was spoken by Myria; it was a command.

“Go!”

And Paulina, defeated and crestfallen, feeling humiliated and jealous of the chastity of the maiden, dared not disobey. She moved to the door, pausing long enough to cast back a look of intense hatred and enmity, then disappeared.

But when she was gone a figure, crushed by the weight of woe that had fallen upon her, crept to her own apartment and there gave way to the agony in her heart, weeping as only a woman can whose very soul had been tortured almost beyond endurance. An hour passed away, and she arose with a strong determination in her heart, hiding her grief within and erasing all signs of weeping from her face. Her face again assumed its calmness, and her form was drawn erect.

Shortly afterwards, with firm, steady tread she left the house on a mission that she imparted to not even her mother, and walked along the crowded thoroughfares, unconscious of the gaze of the curious and boldly impertinent, for her beauty could not fail to attract attention, though none dared to brave the scorn of purity by presuming to address her. All the happy light had died out of her eyes, leaving the

lines of suffering plainly revealed, and her mind was busy with the strange interview just ended. Her heart had been wounded unto death, and was bleeding under the weight of almost unendurable pain, but her undaunted spirit was evinced by every step that she took. If she had been accused of jealousy, a vigorous and indignant denial would have followed, but she could not deny even to herself that a dull pain was tugging at her heart, and that it was because she had been forced to believe Cestus guilty of an intrigue with the Roman woman, though she had not allowed the conviction to be known. That Paulina had been with Cestus in the prison she could not find it in her heart to deny, since the woman's words bore an impress of truth in that particular, and the fact gave her a feeling of insufferable agony. However, a woman's heart is the most complex thing in all nature; no one can with accuracy prophesy how it will act when under the influence of jealous pain—whether it will become vindictive and seek the ruin of the false one, or whether it will resign itself to dethronement and meekly caress the chastising hand. Neither can the wise man say what peculiar trait of character such jealousy will bring forth in a woman, for under its influence development is sure; good or bad qualities are speedily exposed. Perchance an evil soul that has been held in restraint will show itself suddenly in passionate retaliation, stopping at nothing to degrade and humiliate the of-

fender, where before all was sweetness and peace; or, again, a pure, holy spirit, forgiving but not forgetting, may come to the surface, feeling all the agony of unrequited love, but giving no blow for the wound that has been received.

Myria felt all the sorrow and grief, but not the bitterness, of the jealous pangs that tortured her heart. Her strong, young nature could suffer much in silence, giving no sign to the world, but deep in her heart a passionate voice cried out for redress—a voice that could not be stifled or ignored. Cestus had deceived her, but she would do him no wrong—she would not seek revenge. Her spirit was proud in its very firmness, and would not seek a forbidden happiness.

CHAPTER XV.

THE JUDGMENT OF ROME.

NEAR the entrance of the palace of the procurator Myria met Phrates. He stared at her in great astonishment, and almost caught his breath because of her great beauty, but remembering himself in time, the warning of Cestus being present in his mind, he bowed low before her.

"I greet thee, fair Myria," he said, "and crave thy pardon for my boldness in addressing thee before. It was but the awkward mistake of a soldier unused to the soft ways of women, and I claim thy mercy."

Myria looked into the rugged face, and understood the honest and courageous character of the man, and with the quick intuition of a woman, saw that he had a heart that stood abashed because of the roughness of the body, a sensibility that accorded not at all with the hardy and somewhat reckless carriage he assumed. Her eyes rested upon him very gravely for a moment; then she smiled, and he saw the coming forgiveness.

"I do pardon thee," she said softly, "for I think

thou didst mean no harm. Perhaps it was but the custom of thy country to address an unprotected maiden. Art thou not of the company of Cestus?"

"Yea," wonderingly, "and why dost thou ask?"

"Because I have heard news that doth concern thee. Certain information hath reached me that the sentence of thy commander, the noble Cestus, hath been changed from imprisonment in the galleys for life to a quick and ignominious death."

Phrates uttered an exclamation that was very much like an oath, and involuntarily seized the hilt of his sword.

"That cannot be, fair Myria!" he cried. "Thine information is wrong. Pilate would not dare to _____,"

"But I tell thee it is so," she asserted vigorously. "A woman of the palace did tell me of the change but a little while ago, and she is in position to know. It will be made public, so I am informed, before the day is over."

She watched his face narrowly, and saw it change from surprise and fear to deep determination and wrath. The frown that had gathered on his seared brows was succeeded by a fierce scowl that spoke of the strong feelings of rage called up by her announcement.

"Who was thine informant?" he asked abruptly; then, seeing that she shrank away from him at the rough tone of his voice: "I again crave thy pardon,

but thy news hath so worked upon me that I can speak no soft words. Forgive the roughness of a soldier, and tell me all thou canst of this thing."

"I was told by one Paulina, a woman of the palace, and——"

"I know her!" he ejaculated; "a false-hearted creature of many sins and countless iniquities. But it is possible that she spoke the truth to thee in this instance! How is it," with sudden suspicion, "that thou dost associate with her? I thought better of thee, and thou dost not bear such a reputation."

"I held converse with her to-day for the first time," Myria responded with some warmth, "and only because she came to my house. Her reason for doing so was, so she said, to bear me the tidings that my father was alive."

"A very extraordinary thing for the good Paulina," scornfully. "What next, I wonder? Will she ask thee to pray to thy God for her? Have thou nothing to with that woman on thy life. But of Cestus—did the woman impress thee as telling the truth, and what were her words to thee? When is the execution to take place, and why did Pilate change his mind so quickly? Did she," fiercely, "have anything to do with it?"

"I think not so, for she seemed much distressed. Her words to me were that she had overheard Pilate saying that he would have Cestus put to death instead of being sent to the galleys."

Her voice trembled, and he looked at her face searchingly.

"And thine interest in the fate of Cestus?" he asked quickly, but not unkindly. "Dost love him?"

"I would save him if it were possible," she replied evasively, her face crimsoning with conscious embarrassment before his gaze.

"I mean no offence," he made haste to say, "but I would know the friends of Cestus from his foes, who are many. Thy people are his worst enemies. Whither goest thou?"

"To the procurator."

"Dost mean that thou wilt go into the palace?" in amazement. "Is it not a pollution for thee, a maiden of the Jews, to enter a Roman house? I have understood as much from others of thy faith."

"It is so considered," she answered, "but I must go of necessity. A life may depend upon my pleading, and I will not stand back."

A glimmering of light broke over Phrates' mind, and a look of blank amazement slowly crossed the rugged features. She was going to plead for Cestus—to ask the procurator to spare his life. This frail, beautiful creature would brave the awful majesty of the great ruler to ask pardon for a Roman soldier—a despised Gentile; she would violate the customs and traditions of her people, thereby incurring their hatred to do so. All this passed through his mind in a

moment's time, and he felt himself a coward beside her.

"I wish thee success," he said fervently, and with a slight quiver of the firmly set lips she thanked him and passed on to the palace entrance.

She was destined to be interrupted, however, for as she set foot upon the marble steps leading to the reception hall Malchus stepped before her, his face distorted with rage not unmixed with fear.

"Whither wouldst thou go, Myria?" he queried almost threateningly. "Dost thou not know it is ruin to thee—a Jewess—to enter the palace? Go to thy home and leave such matters to wiser heads."

"I go to a greater power than thou," she replied calmly, with a scornful ring in her voice that made him wince. "Why dost thou presume to stand in my way, and by what authority dost thou dare to command me?"

"By the authority of thy religion; by all the power and right of the priesthood, I say to thee enter not that house at thy peril. Wouldst thou be cast off from thy people and be banished from thy native city because of thy foolish infatuation for a dog of a Roman?"

"And I say to thee," she said loftily, "that I do not recognize thy right to command me. I was not born in slavery, and have not placed the keeping of my soul and conscience in thy hands. What I do concerns myself alone, and not thee. When I stand

in need of thy counsel I will gladly call upon thee, but in this matter I give thee no right to interfere. Stand thou aside."

"But think of what thou wouldst do," he argued angrily. "Not only will thy people forsake thee for this pollution, but thy soul is in danger in thus violating the law. It is my duty to protect thee, for thou art too young to know the consequence of thine act."

A slightly contemptuous smile curled her lips, and her eyes pierced him through like a knife.

"Thou art of a sudden very considerate, but I cannot appreciate thy kindness. Thou canst take this word with thee, that I care naught for thy tenderheartedness."

With a sudden movement she sprang far up the steps and into the shadow of the entrance. He muttered an imprecation, but dared not follow her beyond the pavement, for it would have ruined his priestly character and influence thus to enter a Roman house, and he would have been denied participation in the feast of the passover soon to take place.

Once inside the stately palace, Myria knew not which way to turn. To the simple maiden, unused to such splendor and pomp, the view was dazzling and bewildering. The hour was near midday, but the palace was hardly awake, for the luxurious and ease-loving Romans were not of early habits. Somewhere in the interior stringed instruments were being



played, and the soft tones came to her ears with soothing influence, lowering to a certain extent the nervous apprehension under which she was laboring. Her heart resented the alleviating melody, because it was heavy with sorrow in itself, and as she stood waiting for some one to approach her grief slowly settled into the calmness of determination, bringing a courage to her mind that made her eager to face the situation and have it over with.

Presently a woman, whether a servant or not she could not tell, came near her, and seeing the silent figure standing by the entrance, approached and looked into her face with brazen boldness.

"How is this?" she asked, laughing in a mocking way. "Wouldst thou become a Roman lady—thou, a Jewess, and so devout that the bare mention of wickedness doth offend thee? Thou art bold to enter the palace so early in the day. What if we keep thee with us against thy will?"

"I came to see the procurator," Myria answered, without regard to the bantering tone and words of the other. "Wilt thou show me the way?"

The woman threw her head back and laughed coarsely and loudly.

"To see the procurator—thou? Of a truth thou art bolder than I thought. What is thy business with him?"

"That I will tell to him alone," calmly. "Wilt

thou show me where to find him, or call some one that I may be directed?"

"Neither the one nor the other, my fair piece of impudence. It would better suit thy manners to have thee thrown out, but I only laugh at thee because of thine ignorance. See the procurator, indeed! Dost thou presume to think he will receive thee? Thou, a——"

"What is the cause of thy mirth so early in the day, Nicanus?" a voice interrupted from far down the long hall, and the figure of a woman clad in a loose morning robe stepped into view, walking towards the entrance as she spoke.

"Thou wouldst be amused too, Paulina," was the response, "if thou couldst hear the demands of this simple creature. She will see Pilate, she says, and declares that no one shall know her business with him but himself. Come thou and look at her—it will make the morning sit more lightly on thy shoulders."

Myria started with surprise when she heard the name of Paulina, and her heart grew heavy within her, but the only sign was a slight stiffening of the figure and a determined contraction of the muscles around her mouth. There was no fear in her nature, and she stood without speaking or making reply.

Paulina had approached within a few paces of her before she discovered her identity, then a malignant and hateful smile spread over her dark countenance. She laughed in a strained manner.

"I know her well," she said. "It is Myria—the much talked-of and notorious woman who hath obtained some little prominence because she was carried through the streets by Cestus."

"Ho! then are we indeed highly favored," the other woman cried loudly. "The great Jewish beauty—the only woman in Jerusalem who could turn the head of so cold a man as Cestus. Let me look at her again, and thou, Paulina, take close note of her beautifying arts that we may know how to charm the hearts of men. See thou those cheeks; dost think their color is that of nature? Nay, I tell thee the women of Jerusalem know much more of the toilet than we of Rome. Myria—the byword of the city—the pride of the Jewish nation—let me look upon thee and learn how thou didst accomplish so much beauty. Tell me, and I take thee to Pilate on the instant. What sayest thou, Paulina, will Pilate receive her without losing his heart and granting her anything she may desire?"

Myria stood unmoved by the taunts, and her face expressed nothing but the utmost coldness and disdain—indeed, she hardly heard the words, for her mind was bent on a higher mission, and she was impatient of the delay.

"She is stricken dumb," Paulina said, laughing scornfully. "See how she quakes for fear." She walked close to Myria, and, conscious of the advantage of her surroundings, leered into her face. "Dost

thou think to impress Pilate with thy strict virtue, my good girl? Of a truth he will believe thee readily enough, but may put thee to the test. What then, sayest thou? How would it fare with thee if we keep thee with us and allow thee no liberty to depart?"

"I fear thee not," Myria responded, the intense contempt she felt ringing in her voice; "neither do I care for thy threats. I came to see the procurator, and I ask not thine assistance. If thou wilt be good enough to call some to attend me I will thank thee."

Paulina lost control of her temper in an instant.

"I would not oblige thee in anything, thou fool, but because I know thou wilt fail in thy mission I will put thee in the way to find Pilate."

She raised her voice and called out loudly, whereupon a soldier appeared in the hall, and at her signal approached.

"Conduct this woman to the audience chamber," she said, "and inform Pilate that he is wanted on very important business." She laughed cynically, and the man smiled knowingly. "Obey!" she commanded sharply, and without a word he motioned Myria to accompany him, and led the way down the hall.

"What wouldst thou?" Pilate asked a little later, coming into the audience chamber and finding Myria waiting for him. His face expressed the greatest surprise, and his eyes scanned her figure closely. He

followed his first question with a second, before she could speak: "Who art thou?"

"I am Myria, the daughter of Trypho," was the response in a clear, ringing voice, "and I come to ask that a great wrong be righted."

"Myria!" he repeated wonderingly, and a heavy frown of disapproval wrinkled his brow. Suddenly he remembered that this was the name of the maiden whom Cestus had carried through the streets, and a stern look settled on his face. "What is thy mission with me?" he inquired ominously. "Dost thou come to make complaint of others who have been lured by thy beauty to their ruin?"

"Not so, most noble Pilate, but to say to thee that no wrong hath been attempted towards me by Cestus, whom thou hast imprisoned. I know not the nature of the charge against him, and would have appeared before thee at the trial could I have forced my way to the front. I have been given to understand that it was because of his having rendered me what assistance he could that he was condemned, and I say to thee that no insult hath been made. I beg thy kindly forgiveness for him, and pray thee not to punish him on my account. It would be a most grievous wrong."

"Thou canst know nothing of the affairs of state, girl," Pilate replied, "or thou wouldst not come to me with such a plea. Cestus was condemned on other grounds. True, thy name was mentioned, but only to show that he had been guilty of stirring up the peo-

ple against the rule of Cæsar by an indiscretion, which, though not punishable in itself, was enough to embitter thy people against us. I cannot listen to thee."

"Thou hast spoken truly," she said. "I know nothing of the affairs of state, but I do know that Cestus hath done no wrong; he is too noble to deserve such a punishment as thou hast decided to visit upon him—even death."

"How knowest thou that, girl?" he asked quickly, and an angry flush colored his thin face.

"I have heard it from one close to thee," Myria replied.

An exclamation of anger broke from Pilate's lips.

"Take care thou dost not repeat it to others," he cried, but Myria checked his flow of words before he could ask any further questions.

"Canst thou not find it in thine heart to be merciful to Cestus?" she asked with passionate energy. "Spare his life, even if thou dost think it well to punish him by imprisonment. He must not die, and I entreat thee to set him free."

"And why art thou so interested in Cestus, fair maiden? Hath he tempted thee so that thou wouldst forgive the temptation and desire it repeated? What is it to thee, I ask, whether Cestus live or die?"

"He would have saved my father from the fury of the mob," she cried, but instantly a pallor spread

over her face as she realized that the words were indiscreet and would embarrass Cestus. She lowered her head in shame for having spoken, and Pilate was quick to catch her meaning.

"So!" he responded cruelly, "the charge of treason against Rome is true, and I have the admission from thine own lips. Know then, thou who wouldst alter the decrees of Cæsar, that it was on this account Cestus was condemned. He would have protected the seditious against the soldiery of Rome, and thy father had slain some of our men without cause. Thine inadvertence hath betrayed him more surely than the testimony of the witnesses. Thou hast done well, and I thank thee heartily, because I was not sure of mind over his guilt."

"But they would have murdered my father," she protested, "and Cestus only sought to act as becometh a man. Thou art powerful and I am weak, but I beg of thee not to use my words against him."

"I fear thou hast said too much, and I can promise thee nothing. The decree hath gone forth and will not be recalled."

"My father—wilt thou give me permission to visit him?" she pleaded, but he only shook his head coldly.

"Nay, not even that; thou wouldst seek to plead thy cause with the keeper of the prison. Fare thee well; I have other business that demands my attention."

He arose and, without noticing her further, passed out of the room, but she called after him as he reached the door:

“Thou shalt not have the life of Cestus; I will save him in spite of thy power.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SECRET ENTRANCE.

To Cestus the visit of Paulina to his cell at night was particularly annoying and humiliating. He had known her of old—in the days when he was careless and happy in Rome—days that left an unwelcome taste in his mouth at this time, but had never been on terms of more than friendship with her. He knew her for what she was—had always known that she cared little for the pain she might cause others, and still less for the twinge of conscience that might assail her in quiet moments. He knew that she was vindictive and cruel—hating with all the venom of a wicked woman's soul, but never before had he given her credit for possessing a heart. She had been beautiful—and was still handsome, with all the glitter and temptation of subtle wickedness in her eyes— orbs that gleamed with sudden hate or grew soft and tender according to the powerful will behind them.

Cestus, brave soldier that he was, could not help but feel a shiver of dread run over him as he heard her declaration of passion and her threat to injure him. He felt that she would keep her word to the

utmost extent of her power, and he knew her position at court—the foremost woman of the palace of the procurator.

After she had gone he sat for hours thinking over her words, but to the credit of a brave heart be it said that he gave little thought to the sentence of death hanging over him. Everything that entered his mind was of Myria—Myria, the woman who had entered the open door of his heart and had stolen the long-lost key to his affections. The gray dawn of the morning crept into his cell through the barred window and found him still transfixed with thought and meditation, and the lines that crossed and recrossed his face showed plainly how he suffered mentally. The proud spirit of the soldier felt the degradation of confinement keenly.

The day came, and lingered for long ages, so it seemed to him as he paced his lonely cell, and at times he would grasp the strong fastenings of the window in his hand and shake them until the room quivered perceptibly. But he uttered no word of complaint to the keeper when he came to bring his food.

“Is there anything I can do for thee, Cestus?” Mithradates asked; “whatever is in my power shall be thine.”

“I want nothing,” Cestus replied, almost savagely; then, remembering that the offer had been made in pure kindness, “nothing that thou couldst give, but

I thank thee." Struck by a sudden thought, he asked quickly: "What of Trypho?"

"He is alive and as well as could be expected. I think he will live."

"Hast thou notified his daughter that he is alive?"

"Nay, but the news hath reached her."

"How knowest thou that?"

"Because she called but a short time since, and would have seen him had she carried an order from Pilate."

"Thou didst not allow her to see her father?" Cestus inquired with warmth. "Doth it not appear to thee to be inhuman to refuse such a request?"

Mithradates approached close to Cestus and bent to his ear.

"There are many things I would do," he replied, "but cannot because I am watched on all sides. Thou art possessed of an enemy who would hound thee to the death, and he is not my friend; therefore must I be careful. He hath set spies upon me to watch every move that I make. I am thy friend, but——"

"Dost thou mean Malchus?"

"Yea, the same."

"Then let him look well to himself if I escape from this place."

Mithradates looked surprised.

"Strange words for thee to utter, Cestus; especially to thy jailer. Hast thou not been informed of the sentence against thee?"

"I have heard, but care not. But why shouldst thou ask such a question when thou alone art permitted to visit me?"

Mithradates laughed shrewdly.

"A man may know much of what is going on, but say nothing. Dost think I am blinded as to last night's happenings? Paulina, the fair, was observed at all times during her visit to thee. She came in by a secret entrance, but could not escape mine eyes." He bent forward and fixed his gaze upon Cestus in a meaning way, and there was a twinkle of daring in his eyes, as though he wished to test the courage of the young centurion. "Not many people of Jerusalem know of that same secret entrance. It is adown this corridor, and opens into a side street."

Cestus stared at him long and hard before replying. He could not fail to understand the secret challenge.

"But it is well guarded and offers no chance of escape," he replied, apparently in a careless manner, but with a quick upward glance that betrayed his anxiety.

"It is well guarded and offers little chance of escape," Mithradates replied laconically, with a strong emphasis on the word "little."

"And where hast thou placed Trypho?" Cestus asked.

"Three cells from thine own on the right," carelessly. "But I must leave thee now, to attend him.

I know thy wish for his comfort, and because I am thy friend I go."

The day waned and the lights in the prison burned low, while a low hum of conversation from the streets reached the ears of the young man who sat in his cell with every nerve strained to the utmost tension. The prowlers of the night shouted to each other in language of gay import, and the sound thereof caused him to clench his hands in angry protest against his own imprisonment while others more guilty roamed at will. The hours passed slowly and dragged their weary length into a seeming eternity, and still he sat on his couch, inert and motionless, save for the suppressed breathing that came from between his closely set teeth.

The watch had called out the hour of midnight before he threw off the inactivity upon him, and instantly his figure quivered with life and strength. A few moments passed, then the door of his cell swung open upon his deft manipulations, and he stepped into the dimly lighted corridor, listening intently for any sound that might betray the presence of a watchman. Then a stealthy figure crept down the full length of the corridor and sought the secret entrance. Outside he could hear the tramp of the guard as he paced slowly by the door, turning again when a short distance away, so as to never lose sight of the entrance. Cestus listened with bated breath to the monotonous footsteps, knowing full well that the man

would defend the pass with his life, for Cestus himself had not before known the location of the secret way, and only a trained soldier would have been put in charge.

The young man laid his hand upon the door, and saw that it had not been carefully fastened. Possibly the keeper had relied upon the strong guard outside to prevent an escape, but Cestus thought differently. Suddenly the young man paused and stood in indecision, then with a fierce movement he turned squarely about and strode back into the corridor. Three cells from the one he had occupied he stopped and listened. A faint sound, as of some one moving, came to him from within, and he applied his mouth to an opening.

"Trypho, art thou there?"

"Yea. Who art thou?" a feeble voice replied, and its owner struggled closer to the door. "What wouldst thou of me?"

"Speak low," Cestus warned, "lest some one hear thee. Canst thou open from within? But I know thou cannot. I come as a friend, and would take thee hence." He fumbled with the fastening of the door, but it resisted his efforts. "Apply all the strength thou hast," he whispered, "and pull."

But Trypho was weak from loss of blood, and could render no assistance. Directly Cestus became angry, and, with an oath, put his shoulder to the door. A giant's strength was in his body at the moment, and

the strong casing groaned beneath his weight, but resisted his efforts. He tried again and again with little success, because he wished to avoid all noise. Finally, however, the hot blood mounted to his brain, and forgetting caution and discretion, he stepped back a few paces, then hurled his body against the door with terrific force. A loud crash followed and resounded through the building like the noise of an avalanche. Cestus fell into the cell, his impetuous movement carrying him far beyond the opening. Instantly he realized that in a few moments the attendants would be upon him, and his mind acted quickly. He strode towards Trypho and seized him in his arms.

"Speak not," he commanded, "or Pilate will have thy life. I will save thee, if indeed I be not caught myself."

He lifted the old man as though he were a babe, and carried him out of the cell into the corridor. Hurrying footsteps were heard coming in his direction, and appreciating the need for haste, he ran towards the secret entrance, determined, if the worst came, to place Trypho on the outside and submit to arrest himself in order to shield the old man. Arriving at the door, he halted for a moment, and when the guard had passed, flung it hastily open and stepped upon the street, thinking to avoid observation by keeping in the shadows. He was not successful,

however, for the guard had seen him and came back on a run with drawn sword.

"Hold!" he cried sternly, bringing the weapon over Cestus' head threateningly. "Whither goest thou with thy friend, and how is it thou dost come from the prison in that way? Stay, or I pierce thee to the heart."

Cestus thought with great rapidity. The situation was desperate, and he knew the chance for escape was small. He recognized the soldier as being a man noted for his rigidity in matters of discipline, and realized that he could hope for no favor from him in the present situation. Neither could he confess that he was trying to escape and take Trypho with him. The whole guard of Cæsar would be instantly aroused, and not only would his escape be prevented, but he and Trypho would both lose their lives at the moment of discovery. The soldier had only to shout to bring an additional guard around him, and that guard would delight in shedding the blood of an escaping prisoner of Pilate, however innocent of crime.

But in the midst of all this Cestus did not lose his presence of mind, and smiled in a contemptuous manner.

"Hast thou been taking too freely of wine," he inquired coolly, "that thou dost not know me, and wouldst dare to stop an officer of the procurator?"

Stand aside, and put up thy weapon. I am on business, and cannot talk to thee."

The soldier hesitated a moment, then peered into his face, starting back with a gesture of recognition, but his sword was not lowered.

"Cestus! Thou at liberty after the sentence of death that hath been passed upon thee? Ho! wouldst thou have me believe thy words? Thou art guilty of sedition, and art condemned to die. Surrender thyself or I cleave thee from head to foot."

Cestus returned his look with one of well-simulated anger.

"It would be well for thee to take note of what is going on at court. True, I was condemned by Pilate, but before this coming day hath passed thou wilt hear of my pardon. What!" as the soldier laughed scornfully; "dost thou presume to doubt my words? Then call thy comrades and let them tell what thou art too stupid to learn of thyself." He was taking a bold chance, and he knew it well. "Call," he repeated in confident terms, "and see what a fool thou art making of thyself. Thou art not well informed. Hast thou ever known Cestus to lie?"

The soldier appeared to meditate.

"Nay," he admitted reluctantly; "but thou art in desperate circumstances and might deceive me now——"

"Then satisfy thyself by calling to those who know better than thyself."

The Court of Pilate

"I will do as thou hast said." He turned to raise his voice, and Cestus watched him in suspense, his fate hanging by a thread. Upon that shout depended his life—the sounding of that voice would be the knell of doom for him—the severance of all earthly hope, and he felt all the agony of dread suspense that comes from tensely drawn nerves. His face lost none of its impassiveness, however, and the soldier for some unknown reason hesitated.

"If I call," he said, "and the guards come, thou knowest what will happen to thee unless thou canst prove on the spot thine innocence. It will mean instant death, according to the law as dictated by Pilate. Art thou then willing to take the chance, or wilt thou surrender to me and enter the prison peaceably?"

"I know what will happen," Cestus answered, looking him squarely in the eyes, "and bid thee call thy comrades. Why dost thou delay if thou wouldst satisfy thyself? I am ready."

The man held his lantern close to Cestus' face and gazed upon it searchingly. Not a trace of fear or embarrassment was visible, and his looks told that he was baffled and uncertain how to proceed. He hesitated, and in that second the right to command passed to the courageous young centurion by superior force of mind.

"Raise thy voice or stand aside instantly," Cestus cried. "I wish no detention from thee, and will hold

thee strictly accountable if thou dost dare to interfere with my business. Speak, and quickly, for I would be gone."

An imperious voice, accustomed to command, can have but one effect upon the well-trained soldier; there is a certain ring of menace in it that subdues an unruly spirit before it realizes the power therein. So it was with the man now.

"If I call," he repeated, "and thou art guilty, it will mean death to thee, but if not—if not, it would mean the loss of position for me, and that I know well. Thou sayest thy pardon will be known before the coming day is over. How is it, then, thou art near the prison at this hour, and who is thy companion?"

"I am engaged in business of a secret nature," Cestus responded truthfully, "and my companion is on like affairs bound. He hath become faint and weary, and I support him for that reason. I have said to thee that my pardon will be known before the coming day is over, and if that doth not satisfy thee, again I say call thy comrades. Surely such a proceeding is enough to show thee that I fear no investigation."

"And if thou art not truthful and I let thee go thy way, wilt not Pilate require thee at my hands?"

Once more the voice of the young centurion rang out in unflinching tones:

"Choose! Call thy men or stand aside!"

"Have I thy word that thou wilt make no mention of my name, or implicate me in anything that may arise, Cestus? Thy word alone is enough for me."

"Truly, thou art of a sudden generous in thy confidence," Cestus replied, veiling the note of eager compliance in his voice, "but I will give thee my word that thou shalt not be known in anything that may be said. I extract a like promise from thee, however, for, as I said before, I am on a secret mission."

"And I give it gladly," the soldier replied, apparently relieved, and at last believing that Cestus spoke the truth, which, in fact, he did, as his mission was of a secret nature—so secret that it would have cost him his life to be discovered.

"Then I pass on?" Cestus inquired.

"Yea, and fortune attend thee."

His sword flashed through the air in military salute, and Cestus returned it with his naked hand, then walked quietly away, reserving his haste until he was well out of sight. Then the open street lay before him. He succeeded in evading the few guards that were abroad, and soon reached an unfrequented part of town, where he found an asylum for Trypho—a place wherein he would be well treated and concealed until such time as he could be brought forth or spirited away. If any qualms of conscience troubled the young centurion in thus violating the law of Cæsar by aiding in the escape of a prisoner,

he consoled himself by thinking of the unmeasured injustice and cruelty meted out by the Roman forces for trifling offences. He gave no thought to the danger that threatened himself should his part in the affair become known to Pilate; in fact, he was of that brave mold of character that makes no count of the cost when performing an act that seemed right.

When he had attended to Trypho, he set out to find Phrates, going to his residence instead of to the company room.

"Then nothing remains for thee but flight," Phrates replied, when he had heard the story of the escape from prison, "for Pilate will be quick to punish thee. Go to Rome and plead before Cæsar."

"I shall remain in Jerusalem," Cestus responded, and the veteran gazed upon him in open-mouthed wonder and amazement.

"Then thou art a bigger fool than I thought thee. Wouldst thou be cast again into the cell thou hast deserted? Thinkest thou that Pilate will allow thee thy liberty after having blazoned thy doom through the city and made much of the death of an officer of Rome because of having broken the Jewish laws? He hath planned to pacify the people by thy death. It is foolish for thee to remain and be offered up in this way. Get thee out of the city and beyond the jurisdiction of Pilate. If thou wilt not go to Rome, then hie thee to Herod and plead thy cause before him."

"Thou art a brave man, Phrates, and I cannot believe thou wouldst counsel me to fly before the face of danger, notwithstanding thou wouldst save my life. Death to me would be preferable to disgrace. Already hath Pilate tried to disgrace me before the people, and if I die after having justified myself it is well—I make no complaint. But that justification must come before the death; therefore I remain."

Phrates turned upon him and grasped his hand.

"I think thee foolhardy, but I am proud of thee," he said, and his rough, scarred face shone with a great light of admiration. "Stay thou, therefore, and if thou dost not find justice, say but a word and the company is ready to hew its way to the throne in thy cause. The men have bewailed thy loss, Cestus, until they are ripe for any desperate undertaking, no matter if it mean death to every one of them. They are loyal to thee."

"I know that full well, Phrates; but I would not lead them into trouble. Watch thou the morrow, and see what the day brings forth."

"And if it brings thy death," Phrates cried hotly, "there are many who will die with thee."

Meanwhile the guard at the prison door, after having allowed Cestus to pass, had entered the building and found Mithradates, the keeper.

"Is there anything wrong in the house?" he inquired. "Have any of the prisoners tried to escape?"

Mithradates looked him over carefully before re-

plying, debating in his mind how far he could trust the man. He knew him to be very strict in the performance of his duty. The keeper also knew that Cestus had escaped; in truth, he had placed his own head in peril by leaving the way open, but shrewdly guessed that the guard had failed to stop him at the secret door, thus becoming equally guilty before the law.

"Yea, there hath been an escape," he responded in a low tone, and the guard started and looked around him guiltily.

"Cestus and a Jew?" he asked, with bated breath.

"Yea, Cestus and a Jew. But, see thou," confidentially, "in what a predicament it places us both. I am guilty of having allowed the escape, and would suffer death for my negligence, but thou"—and his voice took on a tone of strong condemnation—"art more guilty, in that he passed the point thou didst guard so zealously. There remains but one course for us to pursue. Canst thou guess that?"

The guard looked in his face steadily for a moment, as he tried to read his meaning. He was trembling under the weight of fear that was upon him, for the Roman law knew no mercy for an officer who failed in his duty; the punishment was death. He realized in an instant where he stood; how he had placed himself under the sentence, and his face became grave and serious.

"What meanest thou?" he asked, lowering his

voice, and betraying his anxiety by the tenseness of his speech. "How can there be anything for us to do except to confess and take the punishment?"

"Say nothing at all of the escape," Mithradates replied meaningly, "and I warrant that before the coming day hath passed Cestus will find some way to relieve us of apprehension. I know him well, and if he had had no plan in mind he would have remained, preferring to suffer rather than to cause others trouble, for he knows what it means to me. Wait and see what will come of it; then if Pilate will punish us there can be no help for it. See, the day is almost here now, and it lacks but a few hours to dawn. Go thy way, and make no report of the happenings of this night, if thou wouldst save thy life and mine."

"True, Cestus did say to me that before the day was done his pardon would be known. I believed him, and allowed him to pass. He is no liar, whatever else may be said of him. What of the Jew? Will it not implicate thee more by his escape?"

"One Jew more or less will make no difference where there are hundreds in prison. If it becomes necessary, I can say that he hath died, and report his burial. No one shall be able to dispute this point, for the death list is large now. Trouble not thy mind on that score, but leave it all with me. Thou and I are both guilty."

"How did Cestus gain his liberty through the se-

cret door?" the guard questioned shrewdly, "since it was secured and thou didst hold the key?"

"That is neither here nor there," Mithradates responded evasively, not wishing to press the point further. "And now go thou on thy watch, lest thy presence in the prison excite suspicion."

"I think thou and Cestus hath laid a trap for me," the guard replied, casting a long look at Mithradates, "but thou hast been wise enough to place a curb upon my tongue. Suppose I should go to Pilate in the morning with a full report?"

"I have no fear of thy doing such a rash thing; thou art too fond of life. Go!" and without a word the guard left the prison house, taking his accustomed place as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XVII.

“I AM A CITIZEN OF ROME.”

THE next morning Cestus was on the streets early, and as he walked along the crowded thoroughfares he was the center of gaze for all eyes. Every citizen of Jerusalem had known of his arrest and imprisonment, and the details thereof were in every mouth. Then, too, a proclamation had issued but the day before concerning the death sentence against him. This proclamation had been couched in the most extraordinary and extravagant language, and had been designed to attract particular attention, for Pilate hoped to make much out of it for his credit.

Cestus paid no attention to the stares bestowed upon him. The soldiers—those who were patrolling the streets to prevent rioting—knowing that he had been sentenced, could hardly believe the evidence of their own senses in thus seeing him at liberty. More than once an intrepid guard threw himself in the young man's way, and with menacing sword halted him.

“Stay! Whither goest thou?”

"Whithersoever I will," Cestus would respond coolly, and pass on.

If he had betrayed the least sign of uneasiness or fear—if a muscle had quivered in his face or a gleam of anxiety and doubt had shone in his eyes for an instant, he would not have been allowed to proceed beyond the first guard he met, but the self-assurance in his bearing, the firmness and fearlessness of his tread, and the steady, proud immobility of his countenance gained for him a passage where a coward would not have risked. They dared not hinder him, for the old spirit of command was written in every line of his resolute face.

He felt that he was bound on a dangerous errand, and one of doubtful, almost impossible, success, yet he wavered not a whit, resolving to throw himself into the very jaws of peril to carry out his purpose, then to face the consequences, whatever they might be.

Malchus, the Jew, was loitering near the palace of the procurator when Cestus approached. At sight of the courageous young centurion his face lost its color, and the hue of death crept over him. A low muttered imprecation broke from his lips as he saw Cestus mount the marble steps, but he managed to escape observation himself by quickly stepping behind a man who was passing at the moment. As soon as Cestus had disappeared he made haste to enter the palace by another entrance, being careful that no one

should see him do so, for it would have cost him dearly. He immediately sent an attendant for Paulina, and the two were in secret conference that lasted for a long time, plotting as only the wicked can. When he left the palace, it was with a malicious smile upon his dark, unsightly countenance, and he again took good care that he was not observed as he emerged on the streets. The sin of pollution in thus entering a Roman house sat lightly upon his shoulders so long as it was not discovered; the crime consisted in being found out.

Cestus entered the reception hall with the air of a man who is on pressing business bent, and disregarding the stares of the attendants or the hour of his call, requested that Pilate be informed of his presence and his desire for an immediate interview.

The procurator had arisen early, intending to have the death sentence executed on Cestus before the day was over. When the attendant announced that Cestus himself awaited him, he sprang to his feet with an exclamation of astonishment and rage.

"Cestus awaiting!" he cried angrily. "Fool, dost thou not know that it cannot be?" He caught himself quickly and stopped short, fearful of committing himself before a servant. "Art thou sure there is no mistake? Dost thou know Cestus by sight, and what did he say to thee?"

"Yea, Excellence," was the reply as the attendant

bowed low, "it is Cestus, and I have made no mistake. I know him well."

"Was he accompanied by a military escort?" Pilate asked.

"Nay, Excellence; he is alone."

The procurator's face darkened with rage, and he turned fiercely upon an officer who was standing close by.

"Thy men—are they in readiness for duty at this moment? Canst thou summon them the instant I call upon thee?"

"The men are ready to obey thine orders, most noble Pilate, upon the instant. There are brave souls amongst them."

"It is well! Bring them into the next room to this and hold them in readiness to act upon my signal. Let them be fully armed."

"I obey," was the prompt response, and the officer raised his hand in respectful salutation, striding out of the audience chamber immediately.

Pilate turned upon the attendant who had brought Cestus' request.

"Let him enter," he said briefly.

A few moments later the door of the audience chamber was thrown open and the young centurion strode into the room, going straightway to the throne-like eminence of the procurator, where he stood with folded arms, his head erect and his face calm and

unmoved, though there was a slight gleam of triumph in the steady, blue eyes.

Pilate regarded him for a moment in unveiled malice and hatred. There was something about the young man's demeanor—a courage perhaps that more than equalled his own—that made his heart fill with a wild anger towards him, and if he could have destroyed him with a look, Cestus would have been short-lived.

"What doest thou here?" he cried, "and how is it thou art not in the cell assigned thee, where like criminals of thy class are confined? Thy presumption will not avail thee. Speak!"

"I am not guilty of any crime," Cestus replied calmly and with a studied politeness that strangely exasperated the already enraged procurator. "I have come to thee for justice—truly a strange thing to find in thy court of late, since Pilate is afraid of the Jews. Yea, I repeat," as the procurator glared at him in violent anger, "afraid of the Jews that thou shouldst rule with a rod of iron. I say to thee that thou shalt not condemn me unheard. I left the prison for this——"

"Who released thee," Pilate stormed. "I will visit death upon the head of him who hath done this thing."

"I alone am guilty, Excellence. No other hand than mine own helped me to escape from an unjust bondage, and no punishment is deserved. They

would have stayed me, but I knew the way of the prison too well to remain within its walls. This I say to thee that thou mayest find no guilt in those in charge of the place."

"And what dost thou hope to gain, thou fool? Dost think I will pardon thee because of thy boldness in coming here—the very place in all the world thou shouldst have avoided. Thinkest thou to trifle with Pilate, and thrust thy presumption in his face unpunished? I gave thee credit for better judgment, Cestus."

"I claim no credit for boldness, Excellence, but I do demand justice." His quick eye had caught the gleam of swords in the adjoining room, and he had heard the muffled tread of many feet. Experience had taught him that it meant an armed force, and there could be but one meaning; they were there to overpower him. Therefore, he must hasten to the point and take the last desperate chance left him. He advanced close to the procurator. "I do not come to trifle with thee, Excellence, nor do I care to be trifled with. I am a citizen of Rome, free and without bondage of any kind. Therefore, do I claim justice." His voice became firm, and the words came from his mouth with a determined ring. "Thou canst not afford to carry out thy sentence of death upon me."

Pilate laughed tauntingly.

"Fine words, Cestus," he replied, "but they will

avail thee nothing. If all thou hast to say is to demand—indeed I like not the word—I will have thee escorted from the palace.”

His words carried a hidden meaning, and Cestus was not slow to understand.

“I perceive that Pilate lacks bravery,” he said with a look towards the adjoining room, and the procurator frowned. “Since thou art not disposed to grant me a hearing and the proper justification, listen thou to what I have to say to thee. Thou art afraid of the Jews, and I know it well. This night I have tested the security of thy prison house, and it opened readily at my touch—so easily in fact that it were naught but the play of a child to escape. There are many Jews imprisoned there, and thou canst not afford to make it known that Roman rule is not more stringent—indeed thou wouldst become a source of merriment for those who hate thee and thy court. Think, therefore, what it means to have my escape made known. To-day I took great care that I should be seen upon the streets by the populace, and have said to many that I had been pardoned by thee. I made no effort to hide myself, but rather invited observation, defying thy guards to arrest me. They dared not, for Pilate’s mind is uncertain and no one could know whether or not a pardon had been granted. Seest thou what a mistake it would be for thee to carry out thy purpose?”

A look of wonderment had crept over the procura-

tor's face at the very audacity of the centurion—a look that so closely approached chagrin as to be indistinguishable. He appeared to be struck by amazement. A moment passed, then his eyes glittered evilly.

“I fear not the Jews,” he declared hotly, “and thou hast forfeited thy life by coming here. I will have thee sent back to the prison, and this day thou shalt die. I have only to call, and——”

“I know of thy soldiery in waiting,” Cestus replied, lowering his voice so that it could not be heard by any one but the procurator. He fixed his eyes upon the wavering orbs of the august personage he was addressing, and a strong defiance shone forth. “Thou wilt not call, Excellence, for thy judgment tells thee I am in the right. Wouldst thou destroy the whole fabric of Roman power by confessing its weakness, and saying thou couldst not keep in prison one of thine own men whom thou hadst condemned to death?”

“I care naught for thy words,” Pilate cried, his face distorted with anger and offended dignity. “Thy life shall pay for this impudence.”

He sprang to his feet, and a peremptory order issued from his lips. It was answered on the instant by a shout from the next room, and the hurried trampling of feet told Cestus that the soldiery would be upon him in the twinkling of an eye. His manner changed in that same instant from supplication

to strong denunciation. He leaned forward, and his eye riveted the procurator with terrible meaning.

"I have not told thee the half that will happen," he said hurriedly, "and it will cost thee more than myself to arrest me. This day I have instructed a sure and swift courier to go to Rome if I am again arrested, and say to Cæsar that Pilate hath lowered himself by injustice towards an officer of noble blood and of the royal line. He is to say that thou didst refuse to admit as a witness the maiden who was said to be wronged by the prisoner. This shall show the manner of thy justice, and the vengeance of Cæsar shall overtake thee. It will also become known to Cæsar that thy discipline in the prison is of so weak a character that a babe could escape. Sentence me to death if thou dost dare, Excellence, to brave the fury of an outraged sovereign. Choose! I am ready to die at thy word."

The door of the adjoining room flew open, and the soldiers burst into the audience chamber, with swords in hand. The men surrounded Cestus, and the officer in charge advanced before the procurator.

"Thine orders, Excellence."

Pilate looked towards Cestus, his face livid with helpless rage. He knew that the young centurion had spoken true; Cæsar would demand an investigation, and his position in the trial was insecure. Not only that had he to fear, but the Jews were pressing him on all sides and he dare not admit the slightest

weakness in the general Roman scheme of government. Cestus had been seen in public without military escort, and it would not do to say that he was at liberty against the wishes of the procurator; such an example would work wonders in the way of disregard of his authority over the people. He was in a quandary, and Cestus watched closely, though his face showed not the slightest trace of anxiety. And Pilate dared not hesitate before the soldiery that crowded the room; the will of a monarch must be outspoken and without indecision, otherwise it lacks force. All the troubles that would assail him in case he caused Cestus to be executed passed through his mind in the space of a moment.

"Instruct that the decree of death against Cestus be set aside, and cause the news to be known through the city as quickly as possible. It is the will of Pilate. Go!"

The officer fell back in amazement, and his face clearly showed his astonishment.

"The decree to be set aside?" he ejaculated. "Do I understand thee aright, Excellence?"

"I have spoken! Go!"

A soldier must obey a superior officer, and without another word the command to form in line was given. The men responded quickly, and in another moment they were marching down the broad corridors of the palace.

Cestus stood quite still until they were out of sight, then advanced towards the procurator.

"I thank thee," he said, "and I beg to say to thee that no more loyal a soldier is in thy service than Cestus. I wanted but justice, and for that I am grateful."

"From this day forth thou art a citizen of Rome, not an officer," Pilate responded; "I deprive thee of all rank, and will so announce ere the day hath closed. Go!"

Cestus bowed his head in submission, and without replying left the audience chamber.

A few moments later, Malchus the Jew, who was again in the neighborhood of the palace, was accosted by a woman who was hurrying away.

"Cestus is free, but no longer an officer of Rome," she said.

"Thou dost bring good and bad news in a breath, Paulina," he replied. "Whither wouldst thou go?"

"To take advantage of my knowledge of the affair before it leaks to the public," meaningly. "I would forestall Cestus."

"Thou art cunning, but couldst thou not influence Pilate as I did request thee?"

"Nay, I dared not try, but it is not too late to profit by his freedom. Thou shalt see how Paulina can overreach the docile Myria and the valiant Cestus. Wait thou in patience and the fruit shall yet be ours."

"Then haste thee on thy mission. I trust to thy wickedness to carry us both to success."

Whatever might be said about Paulina, no one could accuse her of timidity. A certain brazen look in her face had carried her through many a situation that would have been lost to a less hardened soul, and those who knew her avoided giving offence to the woman who would stop at nothing to retaliate.

She went straight to Myria's house, notwithstanding that she had been repulsed so short a time since. She could afford to forget the insults she had received and given in order to carry through the scheme she had in mind.

"I know thou dost not welcome me," she said as Myria stood before her on the threshold without bidding her to enter, "but I come to prove to thee that my words were true. When I left thee I went to Pilate and pleaded for the life of Cestus. That was before thou hadst come, and he refused thee because I had wished to keep his compliance with my request a secret."

"Then Cestus is at liberty?" Myria asked, a quick light dancing in her eyes. The news was welcome by whatever carrier.

"Yea, at liberty, and he owes his freedom to me. Pilate could do naught but pardon him when I pleaded so strongly. Thou seest he would give no heed to thee. Dost thou know why I have interested myself so much in Cestus?"

"Because thou wouldst possess him?"

Paulina laughed, and a hard unfeeling note rang in her voice.

"Possess him! Do I not already? Hath the soldier not declared his undying love for me more times than thou hast years? Nay, not that I would possess him, but that he reminded me of the days in Rome when he and I were happy together, I fool enough to believe that I loved him, and he in truth loving me. He spoke so strongly of the love he yet bore for me that I could not refuse to intercede with Pilate for him. I have come to thee that thou mayest be undeceived, Myria, though thou wouldst treat me as an enemy. Cestus cares nothing for thee."

"And is that the extent of thy mission?" Myria asked, hardly able to restrain the contempt she felt for this creature of pagan Rome. "It would seem that thou art most kind to thus inconvenience thyself upon so slight a cause."

"I hastened to thee to prepare thee with the truth for anything that Cestus may tell thee. He is a man of many lies."

"Shall I tell thee better why thou hast come?" Myria inquired scornfully, and Paulina gazed upon her in angry surprise. "Shall I explain what thou dost hope to gain in thus preparing me for Cestus?"

"I have spoken the truth to thee, I swear by all the gods. What dost thou mean?"

"Thou hast come because thou art in love with

Cestus, and believe me to be thy rival. For that reason thou wouldst claim him before me by telling of the part thou hast taken in his release. So let it be. Thy claim is a just one, and I have no wish to hinder thee. Cestus should surely know his own mind, and if he hath told thee of his love, I have no right to interfere."

Paulina stood for a moment transfixed with surprise, then her coolness forsook her, and she burst out in a cry of passionate rage.

"It is true—true, I do love the noble Cestus, and thou shalt not come between. Of what use is concealment now; thou hast challenged a confession, and I do admit my passion. Cestus belongs to me—and I will not give him up to thee."

Myria's face went very pale under her mask of cold reserve. Her heart was deeply wounded, but she strove to conceal it; to hide the agony that was gnawing at her soul. She remained calm by a great effort of will.

"I have said that I had no wish to interfere with thee," she replied, "and that should suffice. If Cestus hath told thee that he loved thee why dost thou come to me? Dost think he will change so quickly, and art thou fearful of losing him? Such doubts do not prove thy love for him to be very strong. If this is all thou hast to say to me, I will bid thee farewell."

"But thou dost interfere," Paulina cried, beyond

herself with rage; "thou with thy baby's face, and I will not have it. Thou wouldst win him from me. I say thou shalt not——"

The placid calm of the Jewish maiden was suddenly broken up, and into her eyes there crept an expression of fierce resentment—a gleam of fire that blazed forth with withering power. Paulina found her words arrested before she could complete her denunciation. A wonderful change had come over Myria in an instant, a transformation that amazed and frightened Paulina into silence.

"I have listened to thy words with all the patience I possess," Myria said, her eyes seeking those of the Roman woman and holding them in spite of herself, "and I will have no more of them. A second time thou hast come to me with a lie upon thy tongue, and I will hear nothing further. If Cestus loves thee as thou hast said, it is well and I will place no obstacle in thy path. Let that statement on my part suffice thee. I have not tempted Cestus away from thee, either by word or deed."

"But Cestus hath been tempted by thee, and that I know well," Paulina began again, but Myria checked her with an imperious gesture.

"Enough hath been said, and more. I do not seek the honor of being thy rival." Paulina winced under the fine scorn in her voice, and her eyes gleamed vindictively, but Myria gave no heed. "I say to thee," she continued, "that I have no interest in

Cestus other than as a friend. What else could there be between us when he is a Roman, and I an Israelite?" The words cost her dearly, and it was only with the greatest effort that she kept her face in repose. "And now, I will trouble thee to leave me and return not again. Thou art of the royal palace, and I am only one of the common people, therefore we have nothing in sympathy. Fare thee well!"

"But I wish to prove to thee that what I said is true," Paulina protested, abashed and humiliated before this maiden who was by nature so far above her.

"And I have told thee that further words are useless," Myria responded.

She turned abruptly and entered the house, leaving the chagrined woman of Rome standing in surprised silence. A moment passed, then she slowly left the place, her soul tormented with a speechless anger that made her face appear more cruel than ever, and bringing out the sensuality of her nature so clearly as to almost destroy the soft, womanly outlines of her features.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE LAW OF THY PEOPLE."

PAULINA had reckoned wisely, for no sooner had Cestus attended to some of the more pressing business of the office he was about to relinquish than he set out for the Gate of the Valley of Jehosophat. There could be but one object in his movement, and his heart burned with impatience and eagerness. The way seemed very long and tiresome, and the scrutiny of the people he passed particularly unwelcome. His bearing, however, had lost none of its dignity, though he was soon to be only a citizen, but unconsciously an air of command still clung to him, making him respected in spite of the widely known fact that he had so recently left the prison. He felt no embarrassment or shame—indeed there was no guilt in his nature to make him ashamed—and walked through the streets with head erect. Again was public opinion put to the test and proved its own fickleness, for those who had looked down upon the high-spirited young man during his trial before Pilate, now, being sure of his justification before the law, smiled upon and tried to ingratiate themselves with

him. He bore them no malice, however, and smiled upon those who smiled, passing on his way with quick, light step, and a song of rejoicing in his heart because he would soon be at his journey's end.

Myria was with her mother when he approached the house, and through the open door he could see the white-robed, graceful figure bending with tender solicitude over the aged woman. He stood for a moment lost in glorious contemplation of the scene and fearing to disturb her. He made no sound, but Myria, with the wonderful intuition of a woman, felt his presence, and knew he was watching her even before she turned towards him. At length she gave her mother a parting touch of comfort, and slowly came forward to him, approaching with an exquisite grace of motion that captivated and chained his heart on the moment. But her face was cold, and her eyes, though not without their natural softness, contained nothing of the expression he had hoped to find in them. A distinctive shock ran through him and a chill settled upon his heart that restrained him from saying what he had planned; from greeting her in the way dictated by his great love for her.

"I am glad to see thee, most noble Cestus," she said sweetly, but without undue warmth. "Thy friends are proud to know thou hast been accorded a late justice, since it could not attend thee before."

"I thank thee for thy kindly words," he said in a voice from which all the life had departed. She

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started at the sound thereof, but beyond a slight drooping of the fair head made no sign. "I have come to thee as soon as I possibly could," he continued, hoping that he had mistaken her manner and that she would understand why he had made such haste.

She understood, what woman does not, but in her heart a voice cried out that he was false and had only come to repeat what he had said to many women before.

"It was good of thee to remember me," she replied. "Tell me of thyself, and how thou didst secure a pardon so quickly?"

"What can it matter," he said bitterly, "how the pardon was secured, or, indeed, whether it was secured at all? A life is only of value to those who would enjoy it, and I can see no gleam of light in the future. I have lost position and—everything that makes life endurable. What matter it all, I say?"

"I have heard of thy loss of position, but that should not make thee so downcast. I would help thee if it were possible, and thy friends are many."

"Thou hast heard of my loss of position?" he repeated wonderingly. "How can that be, since it hath not as yet been made public?"

Myria instantly regretted her words, but it was too late; she would tell him the truth.

"I had it from Paulina, of the palace household, but a short time before thou camest."

“Paulina! Thou wouldst talk to her? It doth surprise me greatly, Myria, thou, a woman of truth and purity, to find a friend in Paulina!” He caught his breath suddenly and looked into her face with a hopeful smile. A great light had dawned on his mind. “I begin to understand many things now, Myria.”

“I hardly understand,” she replied, ashamed that he should think her a friend of Paulina, but unable to deny that she had been to her house during that same day.

“And I only half understand thee,” he cried, with a tone of relief in his voice, “but I begin to see what hath happened. Paulina hath been to thee with tales that did offend thy tender heart, and thou didst believe her. Fool that I am not to have known she would keep her word when she declared her intention of visiting thee and poisoning thy mind against me. That she hath done so I can see very plainly, because thy welcome was not what I expected. What did she say to thee, Myria?”

“Many things that I cannot tell thee,” truthfully.

“And many things thou couldst not utter without pollution of thy tongue, I think. Whatever she hath said of me, I pray thee believe her not, and let me have thy friendship.”

“That thou hast,” she said quickly, and a blush mounted to her forehead, which he saw, and instantly seized as a sign of yielding.

"But I would not stop with thy friendship, Myria. I——"

"Nay!" she cried passionately; "let there be no deception between us, Cestus, if thou wouldst have my friendship."

He drew back from her for a moment and searched her face.

"I can well understand how thou wouldst think me guilty of deception after talking with Paulina, but I swear to thee that it is not true."

"Didst thou know her in Rome?"

"Yea, but——"

"And thou wert intimate with her there?"

"It is true," he admitted, and her face grew so pale that it alarmed him. "I was young, easily led, and impetuous," he pleaded, "but even then there was nothing between us but friendship. What hath she told thee, Myria, that thou shouldst treat me with such cold disdain? She is an evil woman, and would wrong thee by association. Tell me everything she hath said to thee."

"Since she hath been in Jerusalem," Myria continued mercilessly, "thou hast been on terms of friendship with her, even when, as thou dost admit, thou knewest her to be wicked."

He groaned in an agony of spirit; the suspicion was hard to bear.

"Again I say it is true, but thou dost not understand. She is powerful with Pilate, and could have

injured me officially. For that reason I was compelled to seem friendly towards her."

"And it is thus thou wouldst hold thy position?" Myria exclaimed indignantly. "I thought thee without guile, Cestus, and unlike the other men of thy country. Truly, they are all alike. How canst thou expect me to believe thee?"

A look of passionate resolve spread slowly over his face, and the hot blood mounted in torrents over the smooth, strong forehead.

"Thou canst believe me," he cried, "because thy heart tells thee that what I say is true. I do not deny that I have known Paulina, and neither do I say that I have not been friendly with her up to this time, but it hath only been friendship, and that is now past. I have thought of and loved thee with every throb of my heart since I first met thee, and the thoughts have come to me like the glorious sun to make bright and beautiful mine existence. With thee, I care little for the troubles that may come upon me, and the prison was less gloomy and the punishment less hard to bear because I thought of and loved thee. The days of my real life began when thy sweet face appeared before me, and I gazed upon thee in enraptured silence. I can never expect to show thee how much I love thee, Myria, but thou—canst thou give me no word of hope, no slight promise that I may look forward to and cherish as the purest thing on earth, and the only light in mine existence?"

A tremor passed through Myria, and her bosom heaved with suppressed emotion. The pure, soulful eyes were full of an esthetic, palpitating joy, a bliss that she strove to crush out of her heart, but could not destroy. She knew it was wrong to listen to him, wrong indeed to let him love her—a Jewess—but the sweetness of the pleasure overcame her stubbornness of mind for a moment. The very soul within her responded with a mad joy to his words.

“Nay, Cestus, nay!” she cried, with the wail of a broken heart in her voice. “Dear friend, it cannot be. Say no more, I pray thee. I must not listen to thee, for I am of Israel. It cannot be, Cestus, though thou art dear to me, and I would not give thee pain. It matters not what I suffer, but in mercy to thyself say no more.”

“Thou art of Israel, and I of Rome, but who shall stand between us?” he exclaimed masterfully, at once in arms against the injustice of the law. “Not Cæsar, I warrant; nor yet those of thy people who fear the power of Rome. Say but the word, Myria, my beloved, and I will have the law set aside. Say but that thou dost love me and all else will be as naught. I will take thee away from the superstition of thy people and the oppression—if thou wilt have it so—of the Roman law.”

She turned a face towards him that was dumb with a great agony.

“I dare not encourage thee,” she replied; “it is

wrong for thee to love me. Between us there can be nothing but the greatest of friendship. Canst thou not see that I suffer?"

"Yea!" he cried impatiently; "but thy suffering is without need. True, I know the law of thy people that a maiden of Israel may not wed a Gentile, but think what it means to me. I cannot live without thee; I want no further life away from thee. Wouldst thou thrust me aside because of thy devotion to the strange doctrines of the priests of thy race? Wouldst thou prefer unhappiness and an embittered life to love, the most glorious thing in all the world? Think before thou dost speak, Myria, beloved; think well before thou dost cast me into the darkness of despair."

"I have thought so much of thee, Cestus, that my head doth ring with the thinking." He sprang forward in eager anticipation, but she checked him with a word. "But in all my thinking or wishing there is no hope of other than pain for us both. Thou shouldst have thought of the hindrances, Cestus. I do confess that I hold thee in high esteem, and——"

He interrupted her with a low laugh of delicious pleasure and sly amusement.

"And love thee," he supplied, and she hung her head for a moment with maidenly shame, only to raise it and look at him, her heart exposed in the glance.

"Why should I tell thee that I love thee, Cestus,

when it can only bring greater pain to both? Of what use are words when they cannot be weighed in the results? Wouldst thou torture me needlessly?"

"I have no desire for words, Myria, when thine eyes are so eloquent. Thou canst not deceive me, for I can see thy heart, beloved. And I will not allow the law—the foolish, unreasoning law—to stand in the way of our happiness. Tell me thou wilt cast it aside."

"It is the law of Moses," she said softly and reverently, "the greatest and holiest law the world hath ever known. From my childhood to this day I have been taught to observe its teaching, to guide my footsteps by its wise rules, and though I love thee with all the passion of my heart and soul, I cannot listen to thy words after this time; cannot even allow myself the pleasure of thinking of thee. Therefore, in mercy, I pray thee speak no more to me of this. Let me carry a memory of thee through life as thou art—a brave, unselfish man, who would not inflict pain, even on the woman he loves, though it break his own heart."

But the soldier—the man of many battles, and the victor on many a fiercely contested field of war—was not so easily daunted. The old spirit and desire for victory arose ragingly within him, and he would have success in love as well as the fierce triumphs of grim war.

"Thou wouldst have me leave thee and come no

more to thy side," he replied, "but I mean no offence when I say that such shall not be my line of conduct. It is no new thing to me that one of thy race would prefer even death to defiance of the law, but I shall find a way to gain thy consent. And now, since thou wilt not consent to be vanquished, I bring thee news that will please thee. Thy father is not in the prison, but with a friend in a distant part of the city. He was secreted there until his pardon can be secured, or failing in that, he shall be taken away from the city. But thou shalt see him."

Myria was almost overcome by the unexpected news, but she seized his hand and pressed it to her lips in pure thankfulness of spirit.

"I bless thee for thy goodness," she exclaimed gratefully. "Thy kindness hath made it hard for me to wound thee, but it must be so. Thou wilt take me to my father before the day is closed?"

"That I had intended, but it must be in secret, else his retreat would be discovered and his recapture certain. I will come to thee when the time for going is near, and thou shalt have thy wish."

She raised her eyes to his in anxious inquiry.

"How is it that he is not in prison, Cestus? Didst thou aid him to escape? He is old and weak of limb, and could not have liberated himself."

"Ask me not," he responded quickly, "for I am still a soldier of Rome, and may not inform thee. Whatever part I had in his escape must remain un-

known forever, even to thee. I do not believe him guilty of crime, and therefore rejoice that he is not in bondage."

She heard and understood; he would not claim the credit before her, nor would he, as a subject of Cæsar, say that he had helped to break the law of Pilate. But if she was silent, her eyes thanked him, and he understood the truth.

He bowed his head and was moving away, when a very timid, sweet-toned voice reached him.

"Cestus!"

"Yea, Myria," he said in surprise, retracing his footsteps and standing by her side expectantly.

Her eyes were fixed on the ground, and the rich blood had flown to her white forehead.

"This is to be our parting," she said presently, and he started with surprise. "I mean," she hastened to explain, "that it is the last time I shall hear such words from thee as thou hast uttered. I hope for thy friendship, but though my heart is dying from the pain, I cannot let thee love me. I wish thee to know that I can never forget what thou hast said, but it shall be buried within the depths of a tortured soul forevermore."

"And I say to thee, Myria, beloved, that I accept no such terms from thee. Thou canst not dismiss me so easily. As well couldst thou hinder the light of the sun from reaching the earth as thou couldst check my love for thee, and as easily couldst thou pluck out

the moon from the night as destroy the passion I have for thee. Say no more, or I will stop thy mouth with caresses."

She looked at him sadly, and a teardrop stood in her eyes.

"Thy language well becometh the man, but there is no hope. I must not hear thee—I cannot allow my heart to respond to thine."

"The responses of thy heart are not in thine own keeping," he answered, taking her hand tenderly within his own rugged palm, while an expression of mixed joy and pain crossed his features. "I will conquer thy prejudices for thee, and the priests will not dare to stand in our way."

CHAPTER XIX.

TORMENTED WITH FACTS.

ON his way through the streets Cestus noticed a body of Roman soldiery hurrying along, having in their midst an aged captive, whom they handled roughly, and whose face had been concealed beneath a cloth that was thrown over his head. His blood arose within him at the sight, and he halted the centurion in charge.

"Whither with thy prisoner," he demanded, "and why so much violence?"

"He is a dog of a Jew," the centurion answered with swaggering insolence; "but how doth our treatment concern thee? Art thou in position to demand of Pilate his reasons, thou who wert deprived of thine office on account of treason?"

Cestus' hand leaped full to his sword's hilt in an instant, but was withdrawn as quickly. He had learned control.

"I have asked thee a civil question," he responded angrily, "and take thou a care how thou dost answer. Who is thy prisoner?"

"I have told thee he is a dog of a Jew, and is

guilty of gross sedition against Rome." He stepped back from Cestus, out of reach of his sword. "And now, most valiant of traitors, stand thou aside."

The men closed around him, crowding Cestus away, and in a moment more the company had disappeared. Cestus was puzzled; the figure of the prisoner had a familiar look, and he seemed to have known him before. He walked away from the spot, still thinking of the strange happening, and went about his business.

An hour after he had left Myria's house she was surprised and chagrined to see Malchus stride through the open doorway without ceremony, and stand before her. His face wore an expression of wicked triumph, and she shrank back from him as the incarnation of evil.

"I bring thee sad tidings," he said with hypocritical sympathy, "if thou art strong enough to hear it."

She looked at him indignantly, and a fierce light sparkled and danced in her eyes.

"Nothing can be more undesirable than thy presence," she replied. "Speak quickly and take thy departure."

"So thou hast turned Roman? Well, it surpriseth me not at all, my fair maiden, since thou dost receive so openly and without shame the visits of one fresh from a Roman prison. Yea," as she gazed at him in undisguised horror and abhorrence, "I know that Cestus hath already visited thee."

"Thy tidings," she demanded imperiously, ignoring his sneering reference to Cestus.

"Thine anger is beautiful, superb, and I like thee better when thine eyes blaze forth like fire. But I possess the news to humble thee, to bring tears to those eyes, now so strong and beautiful in condemnation. Wouldst thou witness thy father's death?"

"What meanest thou?" she cried in terror.

"What I have said," he responded fiendishly. "Thy father hath been condemned to death by Pilate, and——"

"Thou liest!" broke forth from the pale lips with startling vehemence; "thou liest!"

"I speak the truth," he affirmed, with a sneer of satisfaction on his face. "Thou wouldst believe in thy Roman lover, and he hath deceived thee again. Listen thou. Did he tell thee that thy father had escaped from prison?"

"What is that to thee?" she replied hotly, and he smiled again with malignant joy.

"I know that he did, or thou wouldst have denied it. I will tell thee to what extent this man hath attempted to deceive thee. He came to thee with a tale that thy father was not in prison, and I warrant that he hath offered to take thee to him. It is so, and I can see the confirmation of my words in thine eyes. Canst thou not see what he intends to do with thee? If thou didst enter a Roman house with him and find not thy father, what would be thy fate? Thinkest

thou he would let thee depart in purity? Thou dost not know this man Cestus—the foremost libertine of Rome. Again I say thou art a fool to trust him.”

“How dost thou know of all this?” she demanded. “Art thou placing a watch upon Cestus?”

“Yea, and for thy good. The man is not fit for thee, and I would save a daughter of Israel from pollution. I will unfold to thee something further of his scheme. This very morning he caused thy father to be taken to the house of a Roman citizen in an unfrequented part of the city, doing this in haste while he was yet in office. Then he came to thee, as I thought he would, and told thee that thy father was no longer in the prison, and that thou couldst see him. He had thy father taken to the house so if thou didst demand to be taken to him at once he could comply with thy wishes, and obtain his desires on thy second visit. But I think thou didst not demand it, or he did persuade thee differently. Then, what thinkest thou he hath done? A strong guard of soldiery went to the house as soon as Cestus had left thee and so ordered them to do, and restored thy father to the prison, where he is now. This is to be concealed from thee, and for that reason was Trypho led through the streets with his face hidden. Cestus will come to thee again, and offer to take thee to the house to see thy father. Thou wilt not find him there, and being alone with Cestus in a house of Rome, what thinkest thou will become of thee? Dost

think he will make thy visit public or let thy friends know of thy whereabouts? Nay, not so. What hast thou to say of such a man?"

Myria sank to the floor in grief-stricken weakness, and he stood over her with folded arms, his face malignant and cruel, his eyes glittering with an evil triumph, and his lips curled in a sneer of derision. The priestly robes he wore sat ungracefully and in hideous mockery on his spare frame, and the long fingers of the lean hands worked together like the talons of a bird of prey. His very person seemed to emanate the horrible fiendishness of the inner spirit of the man. Presently Myria raised her head and wiped away the tears that had gathered in her eyes. Her face was pale with an inexpressible anger and grief.

"I do not believe thee," she exclaimed, "and thy words are dictated by self-interest. Thou wouldst lie to turn me against Cestus, as thou didst lie before Pilate to condemn him."

"I did not expect thee to believe, but I have come prepared to prove my words. If thou wilt come with me to the Roman house I will show thee that I speak the truth, and that thy trust in Cestus is dangerous."

He watched her face narrowly, but concealed his own eagerness as best he could. A moment passed in silence, then the strong, brave spirit of the girl shone through her eyes, which she raised to his resolutely.

"Thy words contain no truth, and I have told thee thou dost lie. Cestus doth not strike in the dark as thou wouldst; he is too brave for such a cowardly mode of attack. He hath promised to return soon, and if thy accusation is truthful thou canst not object to waiting until he hath come. Then canst thou repeat to his face what thou hast told me. If he dare not deny before thee, then I will believe. Art thou willing?"

Malchus uttered an imprecation, and his face became distorted with passion.

"I seek no quarrel with the Roman dog!" he cried; "and neither would I suffer the degradation of being in his company. Therefore will I not comply with thy request."

"I thought as much," Myria responded with biting sarcasm; "thou art afraid."

"And thou art mistaken. I have offered to prove to thee his duplicity. Come with me to the Roman house. It will not be necessary for thee to enter, as we can inquire at the entrance. If the proof be not sufficient then I will withdraw my words, and bid thee love thy Roman."

"If I go with thee and thou canst not prove thy charges will it rid me of thy presence forever?"

An ugly scowl mantled his brow, but her eyes were upon him and he could not hesitate.

"It shall be so!"

"Then I go with thee."

A few moments later the two, so strangely opposite by nature, so utterly opposed in heart and soul, left the house together and proceeded through the city on foot. Myria's heart was heavy within her, but Malchus was secretly jubilant over the turn affairs had taken. How he had gained a knowledge of Trypho's hiding place was one of the secrets of the vast and comprehensive system of spying maintained by the priestly party to which he belonged. He had seen Cestus enter the palace of the procurator, and immediately set about finding out all the circumstances surrounding his case, with the result that he soon knew where Trypho was concealed. It was only a small matter to him to notify the authorities, hence the second arrest of the aged father of Myria, this time accompanied by greater violence and insult, because Cestus was not present to protect him. It was part of the plan of Malchus to have the captive's face concealed while passing through the streets, under the very plausible excuse that it would incite the populace. Hence it was that Cestus had not been able to fully recognize Trypho when he had met him in the hands of the soldiery.

As they were nearing the palace of the procurator on their way to the Roman house, Myria saw Cestus talking to some of the men of his company. Her heart sank at the sight, and a great sense of shame weighed heavily upon her that she should be bound on such a mission. She turned her head away from

him to avoid recognition, but his eyes fell full upon her form, and with a bound he sprang towards her, only to recoil in unfeigned disgust as he saw by whom she was accompanied. His face grew dark and his eyes flashed dangerously as his hand involuntarily sought his sword's hilt. A look of terrible anger caused Malchus, always cowardly in the face of personal danger, to shrink behind the girl, thus protecting himself. Cestus gazed on him in contempt.

"Art thou accompanied according to thine own pleasure?" he asked Myria, and with a face almost as pale as the costume she wore, she answered him:

"Of mine own pleasure, Cestus, and I pray thee let us pass in peace."

The half-drawn sword clanked back to its place, and the strong arm sank nerveless to his side.

Malchus looked at Cestus from the security of his retreat behind the girl, and with a malicious smile of taunting pleasure seized her hand and drew her away, while Cestus, his face drawn with anger, strode off without looking back.

At the Roman house the colloquy was short and sententious. The citizen of Rome who occupied the house, seeing the priestly robes of his interrogator, and believing him to be some high official of the Jewish religion, answered him freely.

"Thou wert the custodian of Trypho this day?" Malchus inquired, and Myria listened closely.

"It is so."

"By whom was he delivered to thee?"

The citizen hesitated, and Myria leaned forward eagerly, anxious to hear the least thing that would relieve her mind of its terrible doubts. However, the man noticed the insinuating address of Malchus, and his hesitation vanished.

"By Cestus, the second centurion of the royal guards," he replied.

"With what instructions?"

"To hold him until he should come in person or send an accredited representative."

"Did he tell thee for what purpose Trypho had been brought to thy house?"

"Nay, except that his presence was to be kept a secret, and that perhaps he would bring a visitor with him when next he should call."

"Is Trypho with thee now?"

"Nay, for Cestus hath sent for him. A body of soldiery came not many hours ago and took him away. Their manner of doing so was strange, in that they concealed his face from view. When I questioned them as to the reason therefor they told me it was done by order of a higher authority, which authority I presume was Cestus."

Myria felt her limbs weakening, and would have fallen to the ground had not Malchus placed his arm around her. She cast it away from her on the instant, and clung for support to the side of the build-

ing, whereupon the citizen looked at Malchus in wondering inquiry.

"A slight quarrel, though I confess my fault with shame," Malchus made haste to explain in order to avoid questioning. "But as to Cestus—what did he tell thee of himself?"

"That he had been pardoned by the procurator and was again at liberty. He explained that a mistake had been made in placing him in prison, which mistake was most speedily discovered and remedied. Of that I am right glad, for Cestus is a noble fellow, and doth not deserve such punishment. But what is thine object in questioning me about Trypho?"

"I would see justice done to one of mine own people," Malchus responded hypocritically, and Myria looked upon him in unbounded disgust. "And now we thank thee for thy goodness, and will be on our way."

The citizen bowed and retired within the house. Myria, unable to stand the presence of Malchus at her side, turned upon him.

"I will leave thee here," she exclaimed with passionate anger, "and bid thee farewell forever. Come not near me again, or I stand no responsibility for what may happen to thee!"

"I will accompany thee to thy house," Malchus declared; but with blazing, tearless eyes she held him away from her.

"I will go alone, and do not require or desire thy company."

"Surely thou art convinced that I spoke the truth?"

"Yea, thou hast tormented me with facts that I cannot deny, but I want no more of thee," and with swift steps she fled, leaving him standing in motionless surprise.

CHAPTER XX.

“FROM MYRIA TO CESTUS—GREETING.”

WHEN Cestus walked away from Malchus and Myria he was sorely puzzled over the fact of her being in his company. He knew the character of the Jew thoroughly, and from his searching gaze nothing of the man's true nature had been concealed, none of the fiendish spirit hidden. Knowing all this, and realizing that association with him could only injure Myria, he could not understand why it was that she had been with him. He would not have allowed them to pass him had she not assured him she accompanied the Jew of her own accord, and even then he found it exceedingly hard to stand aside. She had said “Of mine own pleasure,” and the words haunted him after she had disappeared. How could that be, when she surely knew that Malchus was his enemy as well as her own? Her enemy! The thought struck him with such sudden violence that he stopped short and turned about in the direction they had taken, thinking on the instant to follow and rescue her against herself. But again her words came to him, and he restrained himself. He must await the solution of

the mystery from her lips; she could not fail to explain when he saw her that afternoon and restored her to the embraces of a loving father. To give her such a pleasure he had risked everything; had placed his own head in the greatest danger, and he looked forward with eager anticipation to the time when he should see her locked in her father's arms.

A little further on he met Phrates, and that hardy old veteran seized him in his arms in a vigorous manner.

"Hold high thine head, Cestus!" he shouted in an excess of enthusiasm, "for Pilate cannot do without thee. The men of thy company are in revolt against Rome, and have sent to the palace to demand thy reinstatement. Look around and see the signs of the times! There is no peace in sight anywhere, and these Jews are howling like rabid dogs for something, they know not what. Verily, the city is upset, and we cannot part with thee so easily."

"Ah! thou art a true friend, Phrates," Cestus responded heartily, "but I fear thou dost overdraw me. What can it matter whether there be a man less in the service of Cæsar? Are there not others as capable of leading the company to war?"

"Nay, by my soul, there are not! Not even Cæsar himself could take thy place, and it would be a sorry day for any one who tried to command thy company. Canst thou not see that Rome is at variance with herself as well as with the Jews, and doth not Pilate

quake for fear of these Israelites? The signs point to troublous times, Cestus, troublous times indeed."

"If I mistake not, we have had nothing but troublous times of late, Phrates. But I cannot stop with thee, old friend; I go to prepare a father to receive his daughter and administer to his comfort."

Phrates looked at him perplexedly.

"Dost thou mean Trypho, the Jew thou didst take from prison?"

"Yea," Cestus responded, "the same. But why thy surprise? I told thee fully of the manner in which we left the prison, depending upon thy discretion to hold thy tongue."

"And I would cut it out before it should betray one of thy secrets or disobey thine order. But didst thou not order that Trypho be returned to the prison this very day?"

"Returned to prison?" Cestus echoed in amazement. "Didst thou say to prison? Explain thy words, friend. Why should I order him returned to such a place when I ran the risk of losing my head to remove him? Surely thou art jesting."

Phrates' face was a study of conflicting emotions, and the rugged features lengthened perceptibly. He stood back a pace in order to more closely inspect Cestus' face.

"Jest!" he cried. "Nay, by all the strength in this old body of mine, I swear there is no mirth in me at this moment. If thou didst not order the re-

turn of Trypho to the prison of Pilate, then is there some damnable trickery afoot."

Cestus searched his face with a keen, penetrating glance, and saw that he was in deadly earnest. In a moment he comprehended that the honest old soldier, the loyal comrade in arms, had spoken only the truth as he saw it. There sprang into the brain of the young man a hurricane fire of anger, and the hot blood mounted to his face in the twinkling of an eye.

"Yea, damnable trickery, if thou hast made no mistake," he exclaimed. "I have given no such an order, Phrates, and thou shouldst know better. It will fare badly with any man who molests Trypho. But tell me the meaning of thy words, and quickly. It may not be too late."

"I greatly fear it is," Phrates replied vehemently, "for thine enemies encompass thee about. It hath been but the space of an hour ago when a messenger from the palace came to the company room and instructed that the men go at once to a certain house and there escort a Jew, by name Trypho, to the prison of Pilate. I made an inquiry, and closely too, I tell thee, as to the origin of the order, and was informed that it was thy desire. But it being so late in the day, and the men having gone to their homes, I could not summon them for instant work, whereupon the messenger reported to the palace, and another company was assigned for the duty. Now thou

dost tell me it was not on thine order." He drew himself erect and his eyes flashed. "If thou wilt but point out the man who originated this lie, I will promise thee his life before the day is closed."

Something seemed to snap and break asunder in the young man's brain, and the muscles on his face stood out in great ridges. Phrates, looking on, was almost frightened by the convulsive working of his countenance, and watched him with staring, inquisitive eyes. Cestus controlled himself by a mighty effort.

"Thou sayest," he inquired tensely, "that the order came to thee about an hour ago? Canst thou say, when it was carried out by the other company?"

"Nay, but I think on the instant. The order was to hasten."

"And haste it shall be, my good Phrates, not only for those who deceive, but for us also. And now with a question to thee. Those who plot against me have found out the hiding place of Trypho, and have sent to take him. Thou hast not asked concerning my interest in Trypho, but I hold no secrets from thee, old friend. There is in Jerusalem a maiden so fair that the rising sun fails to overshadow her beauty, so pure that the very air around her breathes of her virtue, yet withal so tender and fascinating that the heart of man cannot but love her. She is the daughter of Trypho, and thou dost know her well—even Myria. Listen thou to my words. Trypho

is not and cannot be guilty of the charge that will be brought against him; he is too feeble with age. How then, being bent and old, could he slay three of the soldiers of Rome? Yet, despite the impossibility of the case, will Pilate condemn him on the word of those who will witness against him? Knowing all this, dost thou blame me, my Phrates, for planning to take him out of the prison? I am no traitor to Rome, but I am not a lover of the justice as shown in the court of Pilate. Trypho is the father of my beloved, and I dared the anger of the procurator to save him, only to find now that a treacherous movement hath again thrown him in prison. I tell thee all this so thou canst understand my feelings." He paced back and forth in front of the veteran, then turned upon him with a strange blaze of undaunted courage in his eyes. "Do I still command thy sword, Phrates?"

"Yea, to the death, Cestus."

"Thou wouldst lift thine arm against even Rome at my bidding?"

"Against Rome at thy bidding," Phrates echoed, drawing his sword and holding it in readiness as a sign of his loyalty.

"Thou art a brave and faithful soul, and I love thee as a brother, Phrates. And now to the house where Trypho was left. Wilt thou follow?"

Phrates made no answer, but stepped to Cestus'

side, and without further words they walked rapidly through the city.

The citizen received them pleasantly, believing that he had rendered Cestus a service, and the centurion was too proud to show by his manner that he had been betrayed.

“Yea, Trypho hath been removed as thou didst order,” the citizen replied in answer to a question from Cestus, “and I am wondering what thy purpose was in having him brought here at all, since he was only permitted to remain so short a time.”

“I thought no explanation necessary,” Cestus replied, “as thou wert a friend. And now, since he is no longer in thy possession, what good will it do thee to know my purpose? Suffice it to say that I thank thee for thy service. Did anything happen during the stay of Trypho?”

“Nay, not during his stay; but I fear if he had remained we would have had trouble with the Jews on his account.”

Cestus looked in his face with a quick motion of surprise.

“With the Jews? What meanest thou?”

“Thou knowest the state of feeling between the Jew and the Roman, most noble Cestus, and art aware of the fact that they have sharp eyes to detect a wrong done to one of their number—I mean the Jews, of course. For that reason would they have protested against Trypho being held in this house.”

"But they could not know that Trypho was with thee."

"Thou dost not give them proper credit, Cestus. Not only did they know of Trypho being with me, but have sent to inquire as to his comfort. Only this hour was their representative here."

An exclamation of astonishment escaped Cestus, and Phrates drew nearer with a dark scowl gathering on his face.

"Only this hour was their representative here," Cestus repeated in order to be sure that he had heard aright; "a Jew came to thee to inquire after Trypho? It cannot be, for no one knew that he was out of prison except myself and—and Phrates. I would wager my life on his silence. Surely thou art mistaken, friend."

"Nay, nay, Cestus!" the citizen affirmed vigorously. "I make no mistake; the fellow was here during this hour. I cannot tell thee his name, because I know it not, but he was a low-browed, scowling man, clad in a priestly garment that denoted a rank high in the Jewish religion; no doubt he was a priest. I have seen him before, but know not his name."

"Malchus!" Cestus exclaimed, and his face grew hard in its deadly anger. A look of terrible vengeance crept into his eyes.

Phrates swore roundly, whereupon the citizen smiled, causing a scowl to pass over the veteran's face.

"Art thou sure the man was here after Trypho had been removed?" Cestus asked.

"Thy question is strange, Cestus. Of a truth I am sure; he hath but departed. If he had come before Trypho was removed I would have denied his presence. The maiden with him seemed much affected for some reason."

The maiden with him! Cestus grasped the full import of the words, and swayed on his feet like a man drunken with strong wine. Myria had come with the Jew to visit her father; she had betrayed the fact of his presence to Malchus, and he in turn had informed the authorities. Thus had come about the arrest, he thought in a delirium of madness, with seething tumult in his brain; thus had she rewarded him for trying to save her father's life and for daring to love her. This was the extent of her love for him, that she should draw him on to dupe and betray, to play with as a toy, when she really cared for the priestly and hypocritical Malchus. He had thought it strange that she should be in his company, but the thing was clear to him now; it was proper that she should be. Was he not a Jew, a power in the city, while the disgraced centurion, the fallen soldier of Rome, could claim no honors that might weigh in his favor? It was as clear as the day, and all the miserable, seeming truth forced itself into his mind like a flash of searing, blinding light.

The pallor on his face increased, but there was no

weakness in the look that blazed forth from his eyes, no sign of defeat in the erect carriage, and no quiver in the muscles that grasped the hilt of the sword at his side. He stood for a moment gazing into the eyes of the citizen with a look of intense, burning inquiry: then, without a word, wheeled around and strode down the street, not noticing that he had failed to take a courteous leave, or that the faithful Phrates was walking by his side, keeping step for step, but speaking no word. And Phrates found it difficult to keep pace with the rapid strides of the younger man, who was moving in a running walk. Down through the Street of the Bakers they went, past the palace of the procurator, and pushing their way through the crowd that chanced to be in their way, Cestus, with his head and form erect, nostrils dilated and eyes flashing with a steady fire, and Phrates puffing and blowing under the stress of the unusual exercise, but determinedly keeping by the side of the young centurion. Many turned to stare at the rapidly moving pair, but with a glance at the set face of Cestus they made haste to step out of his way and hinder him not. Phrates wondered where he was going, yet he determined to see him through, to remain with him whatever might happen. It was soon plain, however, that their destination lay some distance from the center of the city.

Suddenly, when near the gate of the Valley of Jehosaphat, with Myria's home just before them, Cestus

stopped abruptly, and a proud look flushed his face. He would not sue for her favor after she had betrayed him, nor would he ask for an explanation. The pride of a strong, vigorous manhood was in his heart, and in his strength he stumbled. A free-born citizen of Rome, of noble lineage and with the blood of a race of warriors in his veins—why should he lower himself by seeking that which had once been denied him? Indeed, what need was there for explanation when the facts were so plain?

A moment's hesitation, then, to Phrates' utter surprise, he turned and retraced his steps towards the city at the same rapid pace.

The veteran felt called upon to protest against this mad race with no definite end in view.

"Whither, Cestus?" he inquired. "My legs are not as vigorous as thine, and thy swiftness hath taken my breath. Whither, I say, or wouldst thou consume the day in walking to cool off thy temper?"

Cestus looked at him in a startled manner, as if awakening from a tormenting dream.

"To the Jewish hell!" he responded violently, "if I find not the way to vengeance elsewhere."

"Whether thou goest to the regions of the damned or the abodes of bliss, I am with thee," Phrates swore, "but explain thine object. I am cool and thou art hot. Take counsel of an older head, Cestus, and let me help thee."

"In this matter only the heart can act," Cestus

replied, "and the head and hand should be counseled thereby. I thank thee for thine offer, Phrates—thou art a good friend—but I cannot avail myself of thy service now. Thou canst do me a favor, if thou wilt."

"Why, man, I have fought by thy side, have risked my life on the field with thee, and thou wouldst insult me by asking if I will favor thee. Speak!"

"I go to find Malchus, the Jew; do thou likewise, and bring him to me."

"By my faith I will, and right gladly, Cestus; but thou shouldst use caution in dealing with this man. Remember he is high in power among the Jews."

"I remember nothing—nothing," Cestus cried, "but that I want to find him. After that—after that," with long drawn out emphasis, "I am willing to bury all differences, for the settlement will be sure."

He walked forward with a fierce light in his eyes, and Phrates followed obediently, as he had always followed the master mind and courage through the thick of battle—blindly and without question or calculation as to personal injuries he might sustain in so doing.

In front of the palace of the procurator Cestus paused.

"Go thy way," he said, "and I mine own. There is work ahead for me."

"And I shall not be idle or slow to help unravel

the plot against thee," Phrates replied, leaving him on the instant and seeking the company room.

But Malchus, elusive and wily in character, was equally so in person, for he could not be found in the whole breadth of Jerusalem. Cestus was untiring in his search, and made bold to visit the temple, hoping to find him there. All that afternoon he trudged from one point to another, with brows contracted and face set in a determined way that spoke of the dangerous anger in his heart. His passion had not cooled, as Phrates had expected, but raged inwardly, and the fever had entered his eyes, giving them an expression at once fierce and melancholy.

At dusk he returned to the company room, to find Phrates awaiting his coming. He had felt that Cestus would seek him here, and he guessed wisely.

"I know not what hath become of the Jew," he replied in answer to Cestus' first question; "he hath disappeared. I have spent valuable time in a vain endeavor to locate him, with no success. No one seems to know his whereabouts, and in truth few cared. I think he hath become frightened, Cestus."

"He cannot remain in concealment always," Cestus returned, "and we shall surely find him. Try thou again on the morrow."

"That I will; but now I have a message for thee that may change thy plans. What man can resist a maiden? Not thou, indeed! See, I bring thee something to cheer thee."

From somewhere about his clothing he produced a piece of parchment and held it towards Cestus, who took it and held it in his hands carelessly, as though he had not heard or knew that it was intended for him.

"Where are thy wits, Cestus?" Phrates growled, noticing his lack of interest. "Wouldst thou not hear from the fair women, and doth it not rejoice thee to be remembered by them? Mine old eyes have not read a missive of love for many years. Thou'rt wandering in mind, Cestus, and brooding over thy troubles. Read, it will do thee good."

Cestus, thus urged, unfolded the parchment and turned his eyes towards the writing with the look of one who performs a task against his will. The first word claimed his attention, the second his interest, and as he read on a puzzled frown gathered on his forehead, that deepened into an expression of haughty and passionate anger. Phrates saw the frown and stared in astonishment.

"How now, Cestus, doth it not please thee?" he cried jocularly. "Perhaps the news is not so pleasant as I thought it would be, or perhaps the maid hath deceived thee. Who is she, Cestus?"

"Yea, deceived—that is the word, Phrates—deceived," he replied bitterly, and the cynical, hardened tone in his voice caused Phrates to stare still more in amazement. "Thou hast guessed the secret," Cestus continued, his words coming like the sharp thrusts of

a sword, "if, indeed, it be a secret that the world cannot share. Phrates, didst thou ever trust a woman? If so, thou art a fool—a ranting idiot. Look thou upon this writing! It hath a story to tell that is wonderful because it shows how false a woman can be, how she can speak soft things with the lips to the fool that believes her and at the same time laugh in her heart at his stupidity. It is truly a thing to be mirthful over, this deceiving of a man who is such an idiot as to think a woman can love him, and him alone. Shall I relate to thee the story of this parchment? Thou art acquainted with the details, and wouldst appreciate the subtle wit displayed by a woman. But read thou; it will save the telling."

He handed the parchment to Phrates, who searched his face to find an explanation for this strange statement. Failing there, he glanced over the writing and returned it with a doubtful shake of the head.

"I am no scholar, Cestus," he said, "and cannot read the writing of the Jews. Translate thou for me."

"For thee alone, Phrates, I will; I know it will not pass thy lips, else would I feel ashamed of my weakness in ever believing a woman. Thou knowest the writer; thou canst not have failed to guess already who she——"

"Can it be that thou art speaking of Myria, thou of all men to not believe in her?"

"The maiden who accompanied the Jew, Malchus,

to the house where Trypho had been was Myria. The only person in the world who knew that I had taken Trypho out of prison was Myria. The only being who could have betrayed his hiding place was Myria. For what reason? I know not, neither do I care to think of it, since the fact that she did visit the house is clear. What cursed plot Malchus hath contrived I know not, but whatever may be his part in the affair, it doth not excuse Myria from the crime of betraying one she did profess to love. I cannot understand why she should wish to ruin her own father's life by disclosing his whereabouts, but I will wring the facts from Malchus when the coward hath come from cover. And now, friend Phrates, I will enliven thee with the reading."

He held the parchment up before him, and read in a low voice that others might not hear:

"From Myria to Cestus—Greeting: I have given thy words of this morning much thought and meditation, and have to write thee that I regret thou didst utter them. From this day forth I ask thee to forget thou hast met me; to erase from the tablets of thy mind any memory of what hath happened between us. I pray thee not to strive for the impossible, nor to seek my presence again. I wish thee success in thine undertakings through life, and hold it not against thee that thou hast said unmeaning words."

With a sudden excess of rage Cestus tore the parchment into small pieces and threw them far from him.

Phrates saw in his eyes what he tried so hard to conceal—a mental agony that had tortured him almost beyond endurance. It was barely visible beneath the wrath and bitterness on his face, but he could not wholly conceal from the old veteran how he had been wounded in spite of his cynical remarks.

“But what reason had the maiden for writing thee so?” Phrates asked presently.

“Reason! Reason! I could name thee a thousand reasons, Phrates, but the principal one is that she loves the Jew. Did she not tell him of the hiding place, and go with him in preference to myself? Is he not wealthy and high in power amongst the Jews, while I am but a disgraced citizen of Rome? Again, he is an Israelite and I a Roman. Do not the Jews look upon us as intruding dogs, and would they favor us except for their own gain? Reasons! Are there not enough to satisfy thy doubts?”

“In some way I cannot believe it of Myria,” Phrates returned slowly, and shaking his head in perplexity. “She is not like other women, to run after wealth and power. I cannot understand it at all, my Cestus, and I would advise thee to look well into the matter before making thy decision. Perhaps the maid but means to try thy patience. Easy conquests are not the most pleasant, Cestus.”

Cestus made no answer, but looked long and earnestly into the honest face; then, without a word, turned and walked slowly out of the building.

At midnight he threw himself upon his couch, wearied in body from the steady tramp he had kept up all day in his search for Malchus, but his mind refused to rest, and he tossed from side to side through the long hours that followed. Memories crowded thickly upon his tired brain, and a fair face and form continually intruded upon his fancy, strive as he would to banish it. He was suffering acute mental tortures. It is given to a strong man to love but once in his term of life, and that overpowering passion had cast its glamoring light into his heart, revealing all the selfish, unloved and unloving life he had led before he met Myria. It was all so empty to him as he gazed back upon it, and but this morning there had been a song of rejoicing in his heart because it had passed away. Now, what different thoughts crowded into his mind! Myria false—even wickedly untrue, and the dream had been shattered, the illusion dispelled.

Finally, as the faint streaks that foreshadowed the dawn crept through his window, he sprang from his couch and stood with compressed brows and burning eyes, suffering but unconquered, tortured by an inward fever that consumed, but still defiant and ready to dare whatever fate might have in store for him—a man of strong passions and magnificent courage, with a spirit of justice and fairness to all men, demanding like treatment in return. The strong phy-

sique of the man stood out clearly in the pale morning's light, and his head was thrown proudly erect.

He had not removed his clothing during the night, and after a moment's pause strode out of the house to meet the happenings that the day might bring forth for him.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THY FATHER'S LIFE."

NEAR the gate of the Valley of Jehosophat that morning a woman sat on her doorstep with her head buried in her hands. The morning's freshness had imprinted a kiss of dainty, bewitching color upon her cheeks that contrasted sadly with the dejected air she wore, showing by contrast alone how much of sorrow was in her heart. Her eyes, when she raised them to look around, were tearless and unrevealing, but a pathetic, almost imperceptible drooping of the corners of the mouth betrayed her agony of soul. In truth she was wrestling with the passion that had been implanted in her heart, fighting it as only a good, pure woman will when she finds the beloved unworthy, or believes him to be. Myria, in her strength of mind, could have borne anything rather than deceit, and believing Cestus to be guilty of that crime, she could not compromise the matter with her own heart. She would crush the love for him out of her heart, for she had long since acknowledged to herself, with many secret quakings, that she loved him. But now, after wrestling in spirit all of the

night, she found herself in danger of being crushed by the weight of remorseless sorrow that caused her to bow her head and hide her face from the light of day. There were none to counsel her, none to advise or assist, and with her father in prison under probable sentence of death, and an enemy who would not hesitate to use any means in his power to injure her, it was not surprising that her mind was full of sadness and despair. It had been hard for her to write to Cestus, forbidding him to again approach her, and her heart had cried out in angry protest against it, but she had nerved herself to the task by thinking of the deception that she had witnessed. There was but one thing for her to do, only one course left open, and that was to tear Cestus out of her heart. This she had tried to do, but what woman can control her affections, or what man can destroy the fabric of love by deliberate planning? It were easier to remove a mountain or to lower the canopy of heaven. The world may be robbed of its brightness, but never a heart of its love.

As Myria sat there thinking over the sorrow that had come into her life, both because of her father and Cestus, a man approached and stood near her unnoticed, and not making his presence known. His face bore a peculiar look of baffled rage, and his eyes gleamed with a thousand points of dancing, malignant light. Without speaking he watched her for a long time—so long indeed that his interest developed

into a perplexed and apparently unsatisfactory study of the maiden before him. He seemed to be trying to read her soul from the lines of her face that were visible; to understand the complex character of a woman when he had only approached her through the unaccessible channels of her affections. But it is not given the base to understand the pure unless raised to the same level, and the watcher found his study altogether too mystifying.

Myria, unconscious of the observation, suddenly raised her eyes and they fell upon the silent figure at her side. A look of half-understanding wonder suffused her face for a moment, but it quickly passed into an expression of horror with such a depth of abhorrence that it caused him to shrink back from her as though stung by an adder. A moment more and the fire of a strong courage flashed in her eyes; the temporary weakness had been conquered. She arose and faced him with a world of scorn in every line of her face.

"Thou shouldst not be angry, Myria," Malchus said in a low voice of honeyed sweetness that made her despise him the more, "for thou seest I have not taken offence because of unreasoning words thou didst utter. Come, let us be friends."

"For what reason hast thou come to me?" Myria demanded, her color heightened, but her voice firm and unyielding in tone. "I have forbidden thy presence."

"I know thou didst rashly cast away my friendship, but I will not give thee up. Even now I come to do thee a service."

"And I have told thee that I cared not to see thy face again. I have suffered enough at thy hands, and will have no more of thee. Take thy leave and with thee my desire that I see thee not again."

She turned away from him and would have left, but he seized her hand and drew her back, though she struggled against him.

"Try not my patience, or thou wilt regret it," he cried, his face distorted with sudden passion and his voice was threatening. "I have tried to shield thee from all harm and to keep thee out of the clutches of the Roman, but thine obstinacy hath nearly accomplished thy ruin. Even now thou art suffering from disappointment because one thou didst think above reproach hath deceived thee. I forgave thy doubts and proved to thee that I spoke only the truth, but hast thou been grateful? Nay, thou art ready to again accuse me of lying to thee."

He paused to hear her reply, but no sound came from between the firmly closed lips, and only the indignant glare of the steady, blue eyes showed him that she had heard. She looked straight into his face, and there was no fear in her gaze; nothing indeed but defiance and deep loathing. His face grew still harder and the consuming passion in his soul blazed forth, lighting up his face with a glare that revealed

all the evil there was in his heart. In that instant he stood naked of soul before her, shorn of all the suave deception that had stood him in such good stead with others; deprived of all his insinuating address, and the glittering, restless eyes refused to conceal any longer the sensual vileness of the man heretofore so skilfully cloaked and hidden from view.

Myria saw and understood, and the burning, evil gaze seemed to throw her own pure nature into arms against this creature; this perjured and perjuring churchman who used the name of the Most High God and the offices of the priesthood for his own gain. A shudder of apprehension passed through her as she understood all this, and Malchus realized that she knew him—a knowledge that caused him to step closer to her and raise his hand as if to strike. She looked into his face calmly, scornfully, and his arm dropped to his side.

“I can ruin thee with a word,” he said, presently, his voice drawn with intense passion, “so why should I strike thee with my hands. When I have done with thee thou wilt beg for my friendship and it shall be denied thee unless thou accept what I offer now. Hear what I have come to say and judge thou if I speak lightly when I say I hold thy very life in my hands. Thou art guilty of a serious crime against the law, even that of entering the house of a Roman, and thou knowest well what it means for thee. Shall I speak on ?”

"Thou art a coward," she cried contemptuously, "or thou wouldst not force thyself upon a woman. I would that Cestus could approach at this moment. Whatever else may be said of him he is no craven like thee."

"He will not approach and I have no fear of ever seeing him in thy house after this time. A Roman is too proud to forget the indignity of exposure, and _____"

"And for that reason," she interrupted scornfully, "thou didst presume to visit me knowing that Cestus would not be here to oppose thee. Thou art a brave man, Malchus. But enough of this; tell me in short words thy mission and let me be rid of thee."

"Thou didst enter the house of Rome, and thy visit was not made in secret, therefore, it is well known throughout the city, and thy name hath suffered. Not only this, but thou didst go to plead for thy Roman lover—thou a maiden of Israel and sacred to the church. Knowest thou the penalty?"

"Nay, and I care not," she answered defiantly.

"Then learn this, my wilful maiden. Thine act would call for thy banishment from the home of thy fathers to the land of the Roman were I to speak but a word against thee in the councils." He watched her face narrowly and saw a frightened look gleam across the fair countenance. "Yea, thy banishment," he repeated slowly, "and thy fate is in my hands. I can give such testimony as will condemn thee, and I swear

to thee I will, if—if thou dost not change thy manner towards me. Understand me well, I make no threat, but I have suffered much at thy hands and will no longer submit. Choose thou between banishment from Jerusalem and my friendship. I have said thy fate is in my hands, but I should have said it is in thine own. Choose!”

A slight shudder ran through her from head to foot, and for a moment her eyes were lifted to heaven as if in supplication for strength. What she sought came to her quickly, for when she looked into his face it was with a courage that more than equalled his.

“Do whatever thou wilt,” she replied; “I fear thee not, neither do I care to hear more of thy threats. Thou hast gained thy desire in separating me from Cestus, and now that my father is in prison what difference can it make what becomes of me. Do as thou wilt, I care not.”

An evil scowl wrinkled his brow, and his eyes flashed with vindictive passion.

“I have not told thee the half as yet,” he said slowly. “I am thy friend, but with a word thou wouldst make of me an enemy, and when I change beware of the consequences; it will be terrible for thee and I know no mercy. Thou sayest well, thy father is in prison, and will be condemned to death. This thou shalt see also, unless thy manner doth change. I possess the power to release him, Myria.”

“Thou? Thou?”

“Yea, I speak no false words, I can release him at will; but thou must pay the price of my power, and it is no slight favor I would ask of thee.”

“I do not believe thee,” she cried incredulously; “thou wert ever a liar and cannot speak the truth. How canst thou influence the Roman judgment? I do not believe thee.”

“Whether thou dost believe or not, it is true. I have paved the way so that with a word I can release him from prison, but without that word he dies—dost understand, dies the death of a common criminal. Wouldst thou be responsible for thy father’s death; wouldst thou be his murderer? The withholding of thy consent to my wishes will make thee his slayer. Thou knowest well that I can command great power in Jerusalem over the Jews, and that power is not lost to the Roman mind. Already have I planned so that thy father’s life lies in the hollow of my hand and I have but to turn it and he lives or dies at my wish. How have I gained this power? That is none of thy affair. Suffice it to know that I speak the truth and can prove it to thy satisfaction. Think, therefore, what my friendship means to thee, Myria. But I would not stop with thy friendship; I am ambitious for higher favors, and would ask much at thy hands for saving thy father’s life. Canst thou not guess the price?”

She shrank from him with the frightened and horrified look of one who encounters a serpent, and her

bosom heaved with emotion. His meaning was written in every line of the sensual, wicked face and his eyes were dancing with the passion that could not be overcome by the rage that filled his soul. To the girl, pure and undefiled, and with only the song of a great love in her heart, the very appearance of the man was insulting, and the earth appeared to tremble and sway beneath her feet; the light of the glowing sun to be suddenly blotted out and a sense of deep shame assailed her that caused her limbs to quiver with weakness. But to the man, heartless in his methods and unscrupulous in his passions, she appeared to be unmoved except for the glitter of horror in her eyes. The calmness of a brewing storm was there; the deep silence of deadly menace, and blinded by desire he rushed headlong into depths that were threatening, and wherein his cunning would be matched with the superior powers of a woman's finer intelligence.

She did not answer him, and, thinking he had gained a point that would overcome her objections, he moved to her side.

"Wilt thou be thy father's slayer, Myria? Wilt thou have his blood on thy head when it is so easy for thee to save him? A word from thee will suffice, and I promise thee instant compliance. Speak, and let me have thy promise. It is all I ask of thee."

Myria appeared to be thinking over his proposition, and her face had lost its angry hue. In truth she was thinking, but in a way far different from

what he imagined. She knew Malchus to be a power in Jerusalem, and reasoned that his words were not without weight and truth. In some subtle way he could free her father, she had no doubt, but the thought had suddenly struck her that if she could learn his plans she might be able to carry them out herself by the aid of certain influential friends in the city. Therefore, it became necessary for her to control her own anger and repugnance for the time in order to draw the secret from him. She was equal to the task, though her hands were clenched tightly together and the nails sank into the tender flesh in the effort.

"Thou canst free my father?" she repeated, and his eyes gleamed with a ray of hopeful passion. "I have said I do not believe thee, and do not see how it is possible thou art speaking the truth."

"I swear to thee it is true," he replied eagerly; "I can free him with a word. Give me thy consent, and I promise thee thy father before the day is closed. Is my word not enough for thee? If not, mine office should assure thee that I will keep the faith. What more couldst thou ask of me? I ask but thy promise, and I will restore thy father, then will I claim my reward, not before. Thou seest I pledge thyself as a security, for, should I fail, I lose thee."

"I make no promises that I do not keep, and I do not yet believe thee. What proof wouldst thou advance that thou canst do this thing?"

He leered into her face with a cunning smile.

"Proof? Dost think I will tell thee before I obtain thy promise? Nay, I am no such fool, Myria. Thou wouldst have me commit myself and then thou wouldst withhold thy consent."

"If thou dost think in that way," she returned with apparent indifference, "it is well we should part at this moment. Thou dost give assurance that thou canst not verify by proof. Dost think I am so simple of mind as to believe thine every word after having known thee so well? I will leave thee, and thou canst go thy way. Never let me look upon thy face again."

She turned away from him and walked quickly towards the open door of her house. He watched her in silence, his face expressing chagrin and disappointment, until she had almost crossed the threshold, then he sprang forward.

"Stay!" he cried, "and hear me further."

She paused and turned her face towards him.

"What wouldst thou? I have no other word than farewell for thee, and it is to be forever. Thou art full of vain promises that mean nothing and are impossible of fulfillment. Thou wouldst detain me to listen to thy lies."

With a muttered exclamation he went to her side and seized her hand. The touch stung her, but for the sake of her father she gave no sign; no indication that she felt the shame of it all, but the rich, warm

blood suffused her face in spite of her efforts. Her eyes were turned away, and he thought the blushes a sign of yielding, not considering that the flush of shame could be easily mistaken for the coloring of timidity. His own passion arose at the sight and caution departed, leaving the strong man the vanquished, though thinking himself the victor.

"I have made no vain promises," he declared in a torrent of fevered haste; "neither have I said anything that I cannot do. If thou wilt but give me thy promise, I will——"

"That I will not do," she cried vehemently. "How canst thou expect me to believe thy story, if thou art unwilling to prove the truth thereof? Thou art not the procurator and have not the power of life and death in Jerusalem. Leave me and repeat not such an unpalatable tale."

"Again I say that I speak the truth, and since thou dost insist I will prove my words. Thy father is accused of having slain three of the soldiers of Rome, and the charge is false. That I can prove easily, but no one else knows where such proof exists, or indeed that there is such proof. I have but to call for this proof and take it to the procurator, when thy father will be pardoned. Dost thou——"

She interrupted with a scornful laugh that effectually concealed the intense eagerness she felt to learn the truth. A supreme self-control enabled her to

keep her face in perfect sympathy with the strong incredulity in her voice.

"And they say of thee that thou art cunning and wise!" she exclaimed tauntingly. "How simple thou dost think me that thou wouldst impose such a tale upon mine understanding. It is untruthful in the very telling."

A flush of vexation crossed his face, and his eyes, contrary to his nature, showed that he felt himself injured by the sarcasm in her voice. If he had not been blinded by passion; if his intellect had been as keen as it usually was when in pursuit of advantages and power, he would have understood that she was playing with him, that he was under the merciless power of a woman's smile, the sweet deception of a woman's fascination that has wrecked kingdoms and empires, and has caused man to steep his soul in crime since the world began. To Myria the deception was distasteful and humiliating, but justifiable; she was playing for her father's life and would not count the cost.

"In all Jerusalem," he said, "there is but one man who will swear that he saw thy father kill the men, and he hath admitted to me that his swearing would be false. Why should he wish to perjure himself? Because Trypho hath been so unfortunate as to incur his hatred, and he would swear his life away, backed up by other unscrupulous witnesses bought with a price, to avenge himself on thy father. This man is a

Roman, and hath placed himself in my power to such an extent that I can command him to go to Pilate and withdraw the charge, and he will do so. Thinkest thou now that I lie to thee?"

Myria drew in her breath with a quick sigh.

"Thou sayest he is a Roman! What is his name?"

"That I will not tell, though I lose thee," Malchus cried in exasperation. The cool, undaunted face of the maiden tormented his mind more than the flames of opposition. "This much will I say to thee, however, that the man was with the Roman forces the night of the riot in the place of the Market, and very near to where thy father was standing. And now that thou hast heard how I will keep my promise, I claim my reward. Thou canst not do without me, nor I without thee, and I have waited long for this hour. Come, be not so cold in thy manner; such ways do not become thy beauty."

With a sudden movement he drew her towards him, and before she could comprehend what was intended placed his arm around her slender waist, holding her so tightly that she could not escape. But her arms were free and with a raging anger in her heart and a torrent of angry blood of humiliation in her face, she struck him with her fist again and again. The blows were not heavy, the hands were of too small and dainty a structure to inflict much damage to his hardened face, but they served to make him release her, and with a cry she escaped out of his reach,

standing with palpitating bosom and indignant eyes at a safe distance.

"Thou coward!" she cried hotly; "thou coward! I want none of thine embraces. Go!"

"I will not until I have thy word," he said, breathing hard with suppressed passion; "I will not until thou hast bidden me come to thee again with thy father."

She straightened her form and looked into his face with resolute determination.

"The only word I have for thee is what I have said already. Go!"

He stood quite still for a moment and looked at her with gleaming eyes and compressed lips.

"I go," he said firmly, "but I return in two days for thine answer. At the expiration of that time if thou hast not changed thy mind thy father dies."

CHAPTER XXII.

A CERTAIN CENTURION.

AN hour elapsed with no sign of life or motion around Myria's house, then the figure of a woman stole softly from the doorway and set out towards the central part of the city. It was near midday, but despite the warmth of the sun that beat down upon her head she wore a heavy veil that made it impossible to discern her countenance. The exquisite grace of carriage, however, told of her beauty, and underneath the veil her face was pale but determined.

She walked along with a firm, steady tread, though avoiding the principal streets. Opposite the palace of the procurator she stopped and stood in the shadow of a house, riveting her gaze upon the door of the company room expectantly. An hour passed away, and still she kept her post, aware of the notice she was attracting, but apparently unconcerned so wrapped was she in her mission.

The door of the company room finally opened, and Cestus came forth, accompanied by three or four of the men who had been under his command. He glanced at the silent figure and would have passed on,

but the men, who were roughly good-natured, were struck by her waiting attitude, and were curious to know her mission. They crossed the street and approached her, but Cestus, suspecting that they intended to cause her some annoyance, hastily stepped between them and the maiden.

"Can we be of service to thee, fair lady?" he inquired. "I perceive thou art in wait for some one. Can we find the person for thee?"

Myria trembled from head to foot at the sound of that voice, and her eyes grew moist. She answered him in a low tone that he might not know, and Cestus was not aware that he stood so close to her he would have given his life to see at that moment.

"I would find a Roman by name Phrates," she replied.

"I will find him for thee."

He motioned the men away and they retired to a respectful distance, while he returned to the company room. In a few moments he emerged with Phrates by his side, and the veteran looked so uncomfortable over the approaching interview with an unknown woman that the soldiers, knowing his peculiar modesty when in female company, laughed loudly, whereupon Phrates turned and ran in amongst them, laying about with his fists until they were glad to escape the good-natured but vigorous pounding. Having thus put his friendly enemies to utter rout he turned to

approach Myria, who was watching his escapade with something of a smile upon her face.

Cestus laughed heartily over the affair, the first smile that had crossed his features in many a day, and walked down the street.

"They think to make sport of a man because he is old and somewhat stiff of limb," Phrates said when he had reached Myria's side, "but they forget that I am still as strong as the best among them. There's many a good fight left in this old body of mine, and," he bowed low before her, "I place it at thy service."

"I thank thee," Myria responded, "for I have great need of thy service at this time." She bent closer to him and whispered into his ear. "Betray not by thine actions what I am about to tell thee, and hold thyself well in check. I am Myria, the daughter of Trypho, who——"

"Myria!" he ejaculated in astonishment, but she hushed him with a word.

"It is so, but thou must not betray my presence here. I came for advice from thee, for I believe thou art a friend. Thou knowest my father is in prison charged with having slain three of the soldiers of Rome, but I tell thee the charge is false. The man who will witness against him is an enemy and will perjure himself to slay my father. The trial draweth near, and something must be done at once. Thou canst help me to save him from death."

"I pledge thee my very soul," Phrates cried. "But

this is a strange thing thou dost tell me. How camest thou to know that the charge is false and how shall it be proven?"

"I was told so by Malchus," she replied, and Phrates stifled an oath that arose to his lips with great difficulty.

He gazed suddenly in her face with a strong suspicion in his eyes. The honest old soldier was mystified.

"If Malchus is a friend of thine, why dost thou not ask him to help thee, and why come to one who is a close friend to Cestus. Thou shouldst know that his troubles are mine, and I also share the hate of his enemies."

She could not help but understand the meaning in his words, and the loyalty to his friend aroused her admiration.

"Malchus is not a friend," she said, but he stopped her with an exclamation of incredulity.

"Thou wert with him no longer than yesterday, and did prefer him to the noblest and bravest man in all Jerusalem. I understand thee not!"

"I repeat that Malchus is not a friend, and I hope never to see him again." She disregarded his reference to Cestus, and went on hurriedly. "I deceived him into believing that I was his friend in order to gain the truth from him about my father. What I have just told thee came from him, and there is no doubt of its truth, for he was much in earnest. Thou

art the only man in Jerusalem of Roman birth that I can approach, and I beg thou wilt not refuse to help me."

"I will not refuse thee," he replied, shaking his head in great perplexity, "but I cannot understand it all. Tell me more of the matter."

"Thou canst find the man who entered the charge against my father and force him to tell the truth."

"And lose his own head for having sworn falsely? It would require great force indeed to overcome his objections to being sacrificed for the truth. Thou knowest he hath already made the charge to Pilate; it was done on the morning after thy father's arrest, therefore for him to withdraw his word now will mean death. Roman rules are strict, maiden. But of the man who will witness against thy father. Tell me all thou hast found out about him that I may try to find the liar and do what I can to force him to the truth."

"All that I know, good Phrates, is that he was with the Roman forces and very near to my father at the time of the arrest. This much hath Malchus admitted. He is most likely, therefore, a soldier in the company of Cestus."

"By my beard he is not," Phrates declared with high indignation; "we have no rascals in that company, neither do they dishonest things. A liar would find it not to his liking to be under Cestus." He turned his face away from her for a moment, and his

brows wrinkled with deep thought. "Thou sayest the man was with the Roman forces, and because of enmity will bear false witness against thy father? That being the case, of course, he hath already made up his story, and it will take much to change him. I would say to thee, maiden, that is not easy to find out who hath made a charge until the day of trial on account of the closely kept records of such things. If that day come on and we have not found the man and forced him to right his testimony it will be too late."

"Then he must be found and at once. Wilt thou help me?"

"There is but one man in Jerusalem who can outwit Pilate," Phrates responded gravely, furtively watching her face, "and that man is Cestus."

"I do not wish thee to say anything of this matter to Cestus," she said with rising color. "I am not—friendly with him now."

He affected great surprise, but there was a twinkle in his eye sadly at variance with the gravity of the case.

"If I promise to help thee, thou must allow me to use mine own discretion. I will not be hampered by restrictions. Whatever I find best that will I do."

"But thou wilt not go to Cestus?"

Phrates was not to be caught by any such indirect command, and made no reply, but suddenly extended his hand and caught Myria's in a strong sympathetic grasp.

“Go thy way,” he said; “I will report to thee on the morrow.”

With a word of hearty thanks she turned and left him, and that worthy old soldier, after waiting for her to disappear, made off down the street in the direction Cestus had taken, quite satisfied in his own mind what action he should take first. Cestus had stopped some distance down the street, and Phrates lost no time in unburdening his mind of the tremendous weight put upon it. Cestus listened in surprised attention, his face flushing with rich blood when he knew that he had spoken to Myria and knew her not. As Phrates unfolded the story his face became dark with anger, and before it was half finished he was striding to and fro before the veteran in a torrent of rage.

“Dost remember, my Phrates,” he cried, “that on the night of the riot in the place of the market a certain centurion did call out and accuse me of being a traitor to Rome—a man whose head I would have struck off on the instant had not business of a pressing nature detained me, and whom I have been seeking since escaping from prison? This man is a friend of Paulina’s and hath been seen in the company of Malchus. He is the son of a murderer and hath the blood of inherited crime in his veins. It is clear to me that this man hath charged Trypho with the slaying, and hath gone before Pilate with his false oaths. He must be forced to withdraw the charge, Phrates,

forced, and by all the gods I will see that he doth. But first to be sure that he is the man, and that should not be a hard task. Myria's enemies shall betray him to us."

Phrates stared at him admiringly.

"Thou art a man after mine own heart, Cestus. Only a short time ago this very maiden did wrong thee and play thee false, yet when thou dost see her in distress thou wouldst forget all thine own wrongs and fly to her aid. Truly I love thee, though thou art hot blooded and rash in fighting. When thine age hath gained upon thee like mine thou wilt not be so eager to plunge into trouble for the sake of a woman."

Cestus smiled; he could not be angry with the plain old friend, whose loyalty had been tried in the furnace of adversity.

"Thou wert ever a flatterer, Phrates," he replied, "but in this instance I promise thee that whatever assistance I can render will not be on account of the maiden, but for reasons of personal vengeance, and _____"

Phrates could not restrain a laugh which was cynically good-natured.

"I fear not to offend by saying thou liest, Cestus. But what of that when the heart is concerned? What man does not lie when he is in love? When he doth say that his beloved is the fairest thing on the earth, what manner of truth is there in his statement since he hath not seen all of the women in the world. He

would fain rave over the sweetness of her lips and compare it to the honey of the bee, when everyone knoweth that kisses are without flavor except in the imagination. Yea, I think thou liest, Cestus."

"As thou wilt," Cestus responded, appreciating the bantering and taking no offence; "have thy jest, for I know thy heart is true and thy sword ready. But to the business in hand. Thou knowest the difficulty in obtaining justice, and I admit it with shame, being a Roman. The charge against Trypho will stand, if the accuser can bring other witness to testify, and that will not be hard for him to do." He paused and walked in front of Phrates for a moment, then as if talking to himself: "If it be known to Pilate that I am interested in the case of Trypho, it will be harder to release him than it would be otherwise. I made no charge against Trypho, though I caused his arrest, and would have pleaded before Pilate for his release had I not been accused myself. The man who hath done this thing could have had no other reason than malice and hate; no other desire than revenge. Pilate will seize upon the opportunity to strike at me through him, and will not give favorable testimony a hearing. Phrates, didst thou question the maiden as to what part the Jew, Malchus, had in view in thus telling her of the false testimony to be given?"

Phrates looked suddenly crestfallen.

"Nay, fool that I am," he cried; "I asked her no

question on that point. I cannot think as rapidly as thou, Cestus."

A look of keen disappointment passed over Cestus' face, and for a moment he said nothing at all, then with flashing menace in his eyes:

"Myria's declaration to thee that Malchus is not a friend hath brought up new thoughts, Phrates, and new complications. But yesterday she was of apparent intimacy with him, and yet—and yet," reflectively, "she would say he is not a friend. Did she not tell me that she accompanied him of her own free will, and I do not believe she lied. Malchus hath an object in view." He paused and his eyes blazed with a fierce light as the thought took possession of him. "Malchus, the cowardly dog of a Jew, would use any means to gain his end. A great light dawns on my mind, Phrates. Canst thou not see that the Jew hath skilfully contrived to place Myria in a position where her father's life depends upon her compliance with his demands? And, by my faith, if I remember rightly, the centurion who will witness against Trypho is in the power of the Jew because of certain money matters which have passed between them."

Phrates understood and a great wrath spread over his features.

"Then thou wilt do well to seek Malchus," he replied, "and when thou hast found him—well I leave the matter to thee. Doth not thine own reasoning

justify Myria in writing thee as she did? Was she not forced so to do?"

"Nay, by my soul, nay!" Cestus cried; "nothing could justify such a proceeding. Would I not have laid down my very life for her, and did I not risk my head to save her father; to give her one hour of happiness with him? Thinkest thou then that I can forgive her, and by any reasoning lessen her guilt. Did she not betray his hiding place to the Jew, and trust in him to take her there in preference to myself? What dost thou call such an act, good Phrates? Canst thou use any other name than treachery? Nay, ask me not to think well of her. No power on earth could have forced me to write as she did."

"Still I think thou dost love her," Phrates rejoined, with the liberty of a friend and elder, "and wouldst fain believe the best of her."

"It is true—miserably true, and I make no denial to thee, good old friend, for thou wouldst detect the lie before it could be uttered. And yet I do accept her decision and will abide by it." His head went proudly erect. "I do not beg for favors. What she hath said is said."

"I have promised to report to her on the morrow. Wouldst thou have me keep my promise, and can I tell her nothing for thee," Phrates said insinuatingly. "Hast thou no message for her?"

For an instant a softening smile crept over Cestus' face, but it was banished as quickly as it came.

"I have no message for her," he replied sternly, "and have no wish to ask for an explanation. Of her father's case thou wilt have news to report very soon, and that thou art welcome to take to her, but of myself, if thou wouldst keep my friendship, say nothing."

"As thou wilt," Phrates returned, and without another word Cestus turned away from him and soon disappeared from view.

But when he was out of sight of the veteran he found that a wild rebellion had begun in his heart, and every fibre of his nature and soul called out in tones of longing towards Myria, "I love thee—I love thee." The voice would not be silenced, and neither by reasoning upon the utter hopelessness and foolishness of that passion could he tear it out of his heart, or by thinking of her apparent treachery could he hate her. He tried with all the strength there was in him to conquer himself, and his face showed the signs of the struggle so clearly that those who passed him on the street turned to gaze again. Yet, in spite of all his suffering, the strong Roman pride he had inherited would not permit him to approach her after having been cast off, neither could he humble himself by asking the cause, though the unmistakable love light in her eyes when he had stood before her had told him that her heart was in his keeping, and he could not seem to doubt it even now.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FLASH OF A SWORD.

ALL that afternoon Cestus worked to gain information to enable him to proceed in a systematic way towards the release of Trypho. Knowing the rottenness of the general Roman scheme of government as carried out in the courts of justice, he went to the palace, and instead of approaching Pilate with a direct request for the name of the principal witness against Trypho, interviewed some of the minor officials. However, in spite of all that he could do, he found it impossible to secure definite information, but succeeded in gaining an admission that the centurion, whom he already suspected, was interested in the case. This much ascertained, he was forced to be satisfied, and left the palace, restraining his temper as well as he could. The humiliation of having to ask a favor at the hands of those he had formerly commanded was hard to bear, but for once in his life he stooped to flattery, thus smoothing the way, and promising himself ample revenge if he was ever restored to power.

Cestus was a man of a warm-hearted, generous dis-

position, and had nothing in his soul but a most intense love for all humanity, expecting, however, from every one the same fair treatment he accorded them. Association with the gay and thoughtless in immoral and licentious Rome had failed to blot out the nobleness of his nature. He had not been thought of as a prude, and had taken his part in the gaities of that riotous city, yet his uprightness of character had won for him the greatest commendation of those who recognized the good beneath the surface. Never preaching morality, he was yet moral, though many of the things that were considered proper and right in Rome would have been very wrong in Jerusalem. Pilate had recognized the good qualities of the young man, his bravery and devotion to duty, and when the procurator first came to Jerusalem he leaned upon Cestus to a great extent. But the sudden access of power had corrupted Pilate, as it does many a good man, and he had grown away from Cestus, leaning now towards the influence that comes from intrigues and underhand methods. For this very reason, he had been planning for some time past how to break away from Cestus, his desire culminating in the opportunity of the riot in the place of the market.

And now Cestus, as he left the palace, felt all the weight of entanglement that had come upon him. Not only had he been deprived of his rank as a centurion of Rome,—a place he had served most faithfully for since he had been able to bear arms,—but

his heart had been wounded and sick unto death because of his love for the Jewish maiden, Myria. Notwithstanding that she had apparently deceived him in favor of an arch-enemy, he still loved her, and he could not conceal this fact even from himself. Besides that she had told him that she could never hear words of love from his lips because he was of Rome, and her faith forbade her having anything to do with a Gentile. This statement had not worried him very much at the time, but it was suddenly brought home by the subsequent developments of the plot against him, apparently headed and conceived by her.

Yet, in spite of all this,—and the wonder of it passes all understanding, he was determined to help her to save her father. To that end he went straight to the company room and armed himself with the sword that he had worn through many battles, knowing he could trust the blade to do its duty, and without loss of time proceeded to the house of the centurion who was to be the chief witness against Trypho.

The hour was late, as the investigation had taken him all of the evening and the streets were dark. A woman, cloaked and hooded, had watched his entrance to the palace; had seen him enter the company room, and now stood gazing after him. Her face was distorted with jealous rage, and the moonlight betrayed the countenance of Paulina. When he was out of hearing, she flung a quick word of command

into the shadows behind her, and almost instantly two men, fully armed, sprang to her side. They were guards of the palace.

"Cestus goes to find a Roman soldier—a centurion," she whispered quickly, breathing the name of the man whom Cestus sought, "and I would warn him to be out of the way when the madman reaches his house. I have overheard his inquiries and know his object. He would free the Jew Trypho. Go thou," to one of the soldiers, "to the house ahead of him and get the man out of his way, and thou," to the other, "hasten ahead of Cestus and intercept him, delaying him all thou canst in order to give the first time to accomplish his errand. Use whatever means thou wilt, but I warn thee of danger, for Cestus will stand no interruption without the play of thy sword. Away!"

The soldier thus abjured gazed into the eyes of his mistress for a moment, then sped on his mission. He liked not the errand, for the power of Cestus' sword was well known to him. She had hardly finished speaking, however, before the first man had departed, and in this manner Cestus was not aware that an instant plot had been laid to delay him.

The streets of the city were apparently deserted save for the lonely night watch that paced back and forth at the intersections. As on the previous day an uneasy air hung over the entire city, seeming like the expectant calm that precedes the storm. The senti-

nels were sleepy but watchful, and as Cestus sped along he met with frequent challenges. Knowing the duties of each man, and being thoroughly familiar with the discipline of Cæsar's army, he found little difficulty in passing through the streets. As he came to within a short distance of the house of his destination, however, he noticed that the regular watch had been joined by another man and that they were talking hurriedly, as if to finish their conversation before he reached them. He thought the circumstance strange, for the rules of the army forbade talking on duty unless strictly on a matter of business concerning an order of Pilate, yet he was hardly prepared for the abrupt challenge that was thrown at him as he came into speaking distance. One of the men stepped into his path and drew his sword threateningly.

"Whither, Cestus?" he inquired insolently. "How is it thou art out of prison since the sentence of death hath been passed upon thee?"

"Thou fool!" Cestus rejoined angrily; "dost thou not know that Pilate hath pardoned me and hath issued a proclamation to that effect. Stand aside, I have no business with thee."

"Not so fast, my Cestus," impertinently; "we would hear more of thy pleasing tales. Pardon thee, indeed! Doth not Pilate hate thee with all his heart, and still thou dost expect me to believe that he hath become tender towards thee. Pardon thee, indeed! Dost think Pilate would have us believe thy words?"

Of a truth I have heard of no proclamation in thy favor, and do not believe he hath issued such a thing. Fine language for thee, Cestus; fine language, truly. Thou shouldst go to Pilate with thy humor; perhaps he will laugh with thee. What is thy business now?"

Cestus thought rapidly, and his face grew dark with rage. That the sentry had not heard of the pardon was beyond belief, but still it was barely possible. Certainly, if he had not heard, it was his duty to arrest and hold a suspicious character. The doubt of the sentry's honesty placed Cestus in a peculiar position. Recognizing the strictness of military discipline, he could not expect anything but arrest, if it were true, and he would have commended such an act himself, yet there was something about the circumstance of the presence of the other man that filled him with strong suspicion as to the truthfulness of such ignorance. This doubt, however, restrained him for a moment.

"Thou art not well informed," he said, "and I marvel at thy lack of knowledge. Not only hath Pilate pardoned me and acquitted me of all blame, but he hath issued a notice to all the city to that effect. And now, with thy permission, I will proceed on my way; I have business of a pressing nature awaiting me."

"Dost think I will allow thee to go on thy mere word, my good Cestus? Nay, I am no child to be deceived by thee. Thou art under arrest, and will go

with me to the prison. If thy much vaunted pardon hath been issued thou wilt be freed, but thou wert ever a liar, and I will not——”

An angry roar burst from the lips of the young man, and instantly the gleam of a drawn sword was visible in the bright moonlight that played around them, the blade shining and glistening as it quivered in the strong hand that held it.

“The lips that uttered that infamy shall not revile another,” Cestus shouted. “Defend thyself, or I slay thee like the dog thou art. Thou a soldier, indeed! Thou art not fit for the carrion. Defend thyself!” and he stepped back a pace to give the sentry time to draw fairly.

The man, who had not intended to carry the scheme of delay to such an end, was unwilling to draw, but the blood of a Roman runs hot, and after a moment’s delay he drew his sword, and the two combatants faced each other in deadly silence. An instant more and the sword play had begun. Cestus found the man no unskilled opponent, and his blows were parried in a manner that betrayed a good knowledge of swordcraft. But the skill and strength of the young centurion was more than equal to the sentry’s, and as they circled around, with blade ringing upon blade, he felt that an advantage was being gained. Not a word was spoken after the drawing; a Roman fights without intimidating his opponent by threats, and the work of death went on in

silence, only broken by the trampling of their feet upon the gravel beneath them. In an unguarded moment the sentry's blade found an opening in the glittering circle of steel, and the blade pierced Cestus in the shoulder. The blood trickled down upon his arm, and with it came the fever of fierce combat. He was instantly transformed into a lion of rage, and pressed his opponent so closely that he forced him to retreat before the rain of thrusts directed at his heart. The combat could not last very long under such fierce aggressiveness, and presently Cestus' sword went to the shoulder of the other, and his sword dropped from the nerveless hand.

He sank on his knees in token of surrender, and Cestus replaced his sword, knowing that the wound he had given was not serious. He was about to go his way, thinking the affair settled beyond further argument or hindrance, but the man who had watched the combat without speaking suddenly stepped in his way.

"Thou shalt not pass this point," he declared. "until thou hast given an account to Pilate."

His sword flashed through the air, and Cestus drew his own weapon. But the man had no intention of becoming a mark for the skilful sword of the young centurion, whose powers he well knew. In an instant more he had placed a shrill whistle to his mouth, and the sound thereof echoed loudly through the quiet streets. Cestus knew what it meant. It was the Ro-

man call for assistance, and meant mischief. Every soldier or sentry within hearing would hasten to the spot and obey the instructions of the man who had signalled. The call was only to be given in case of danger to the state. Cestus remembered how his fate had hung on that call on the night of his escape from prison, and realized that the oncoming aid would deal roughly with him on the mere word of the sentry who had called. It was to be a matter of life and death, and, glancing at the prostrate sentry, who was bleeding profusely from the shoulder wound, he knew that it would take very little to inflame the murderous passions of the men against himself.

Yet—and the natural bravery and daring of the man was displayed strikingly—he folded his arms, and refused to take the slight chance for flight that the moment afforded. He would face them like a man and die with his face to the enemy.

The call was answered from all directions, and excited shouts began to be heard—shouts that came nearer and nearer every moment, accompanied by the noise of running footsteps, until directly there sprang into view and surrounded them a number of soldiers, fully armed and prepared for deadly work. The noise had aroused the citizens in the immediate neighborhood, and men and women were soon joining in the excitement in great numbers.

The man who had summoned the soldiery, and who was the same that had been sent by Paulina, was

still standing before Cestus, sword in hand, not daring to take his eyes off the young man for an instant. As soon, however, as he perceived that help had come, he grew suddenly brave and boisterous.

"Men of Rome," he shouted, "this man," pointing to Cestus, "hath attempted to slay one of the sentry, and but for my timely appearance would have succeeded. He hath already wounded him, and would have taken his life in a moment. To the prison with him, and let justice be meted out. To the prison, I say!"

The words acted like fire, and an angry roar broke from the men. Whatever sense of justice and right they had possessed had been lost in the excitement of responding to the call. What man can or will reason when under the influence of strong excitement?

"Not to the prison, say I," shouted a burly soldier, whose face betrayed his villainous character, "but to the death! The prison is too good for the dog, and the law calls for his life. To the death!"

In an instant a dozen swords flashed in the subdued light, and a dozen men pressed forward more closely upon the young man, who still stood with folded arms and calm, contemptuous smile.

"Men of Rome," he said coolly, "listen for a moment, then strike if ye will. I sought no trouble with the sentry, but he drew his sword and forbade my passage. I am a citizen of Rome, free born, and late of the army of Cæsar. I have done no wrong, and

was on business of mine own, that concerns no man except myself. But this man would have none of mine explanation, and insulted me by daring to say that I lied; therefore, in honorable combat I have wounded him, and won the right to proceed, a right that cannot be denied. Stand aside; I would pass. As a citizen of Rome, I demand it."

A grim laugh, full of blood-thirstiness, ran over the crowd, and the man who had first spoken peered insolently into his face.

"By all the demons, it's Cestus," he shouted; "Cestus the once high and mighty, but now the common traitor of Rome." He turned to his comrades with an oath. "Truly Pilate hath pardoned this man, and hath let him out of prison, but did he not deprive him of office, and doth that not prove that he is still a traitor? Now hath our opportunity come in good time. To the death, say I, with all traitors—to the death. He hath murdered one of the sentry, and deserves not to live. Down with the dog!"

An angry surging towards Cestus was instant, but the messenger from Paulina, not knowing to what extent she wanted him to go in delaying Cestus, but hardly thinking she desired his death, hastily threw himself between them.

"Nay, not to the death," he shouted, "but to the prison. Let Pilate judge of his crimes, comrades, and——"

But reason was gone, and in its stead was a raging

fever of murderous desire. The mob would have none of its satisfaction denied.

Cestus understood that they would be upon him in the space of a second. He stepped back a pace, as if to measure the men, and his voice rang out cold and clear, while his sword circled slowly and menacingly.

"The man that advances but invites his own death," he shouted, his face firm and set, but showing no trace of fear. A certain flash in his eye told of the indomitable courage back of the sword he yielded. "Stand aside," he repeated; "a citizen of Rome would pass on business that concerns only himself."

But though his voice rang with menace, and there was no mistaking the bravery and determination of the young centurion, the smell of blood was in their nostrils, and the thirst for blood in their hearts. A moment's pause followed Cestus' speech; then the self-constituted spokesman of the crowd threw himself forward. Cestus spoke no word, but sprang at his adversary, and before the crowd could hardly comprehend the affair, so sudden it was, the form of the burly soldier lay stretched on the ground, writhing in the agonies of a thrust through the chest. Then, when the act was fully understood, the rage of the men found full vent, and they came at him like an avalanche of fury. Steadily Cestus fought them back, and step by step gained a vantage ground against the wall at his back; then the undaunted sword clove the air like a scourge, inflicting a wound

here and there with lightning-like rapidity, now parrying a blow with the merry ring of steel upon steel, and again seeking and finding an opening in the narrowing circle that threatened to overpower the strong young arm that was yielding it.

But the unequal combat could not last; the power and strength of a man, though possessing the courage of a lion, must give away in time, and directly, while Cestus was driving his sword to its duty on his right side, one of the men took advantage of the diversion, and with a thrust, accompanied by an oath, laid the young man at his feet. The sword he had used so skilfully fell from his nerveless grasp to the ground, and his face, upturned to the mellowed light of the half-moon, grew ghastly in its paleness and rigidity.

The man who had dealt the blow stood back a pace and surveyed his work with thoughtful countenance, and there was a trace of sadness in his gaze. Now that it was over, and the young man, so brave and with such magnificent courage, lay at their feet, the men were suddenly brought to their senses.

"He was a soldier," one of the men said presently, "and fought like a brave man—yea, died like one. I do regret that it was Cestus, of all men."

"Truly thou art right," answered the man who had given the thrust; "he was ever a brave man. But what is done cannot be undone. It was to be our lives or his own."

"Thou, too, art right, for Cestus would not have

surrendered. But now his death has placed us in a peculiar trouble. If he spake the truth about being on business of his own, and that business doth not concern Pilate, we had no right to stop him, since I recall now that he was fully pardoned by the procurator. It is a serious thing to waylay a citizen of Rome without a warrant from Pilate, and thou knowest well the consequences. Where is he that summoned us?" He looked carefully into the faces of those surrounding him, then a great rage shone in his eyes. "I was suspicious from the very beginning that our eager friend was but playing us into a trap. See, he hath run away like a coward, and waited not to see the end. What would ye say if he went straight to the palace of Pilate and reported that a murder had been done by the soldiers of Rome upon the public highways?" A cry of angry protests greeted him, and curses loud and deep sounded on every side. He paused and gazed around. "Our own lives are in danger, comrades, and we must run, like our cowardly friend. Think of it—a soldier of Rome running from a victory. Come, or else will we all be in danger."

But they had tarried too long already, for before they were fairly out of sight a man wearing the uniform of a soldier of Cæsar, with his face rough and seared by the marks of time, accompanied by a woman of small stature, shrinking with fright, yet bravely bearing up under the strain, sprang into the

thick of the crowd that had gathered, and knelt beside the silent form of the young man. What they said to each other could not be heard, but presently the man lifted the body on his shoulder and with giant strides walked away, the woman following closely behind.

A little later, as Paulina sat in her private room at the palace, anxiously awaiting news from the messenger she had sent after Cestus, he sprang through the door and threw himself at her feet in abject fear.

"Mercy, dear mistress," he cried; "mercy for a soldier who hath gone beyond his duty, but solely in thine interest."

"What meanest thou, dog?" she exclaimed, her face set in terror, though she strove to contain herself. "Speak! What hast thou done? Didst thou delay Cestus as I told thee? If thou hast, it is well. Why dost thou ask for mercy?"

"I have delayed him, mistress," he replied, "but the delay is for all time, and he will not go to find the witness."

"What meanest thou?" she screamed, and the wailing note in her voice struck him like a lash. "Speak!"

"Cestus is dead, mistress, and I——"

A moan of intense agony broke from the woman's lips, and she swooned; yet the fierceness of the heart thrust brought her back to almost instant life, and with a cry she sprang upon the man and dealt him

blow after blow with her bare fists. Her face was bathed in perspiration; the pale lips were compressed until the blood flowed from between them, and in her eyes there was the glare of a wandering mind.

"Fool!" she cried. "Fool! I did not mean that thou shouldst slay Cestus, the noblest and bravest man in all Jerusalem. If it was thy sword, thou shalt die like the dog thou art for daring to strike one so much thy superior."

"I knew of thine interest in the centurion," he confessed with trembling lips, "and I slew him not." He told her in quick words how he had called the guard, thinking only to take Cestus to prison, and there have him released, but how the hot-headed men that came would listen to no words of his. She listened in horrified silence, and her heart—sickened for deathless love of the young man—cried out in agony against the fate that she herself had brought on him.

"Thou didst leave after seeing the blow struck?" she inquired. "What was done with the body?"

"I waited not to see," he replied, "but——"

"Then take thou others with thee," she interrupted fiercely, "and bring him here. Begone!"

And when he had left her she sank back on the couch in a paroxysm of grief and despair, while her face bore plainly the signs of the torture she was suffering. Suddenly a feverish desire seized her, and,

arising, she called for writing materials. In a few moments a messenger was on his way to Malchus, the arch-hypocrite, with a terse word of communication: "Cestus is dead, and with him my heart."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHRISTUS.

THE next morning a shudder ran through the city. Of startling occurrences there had been many during the reign of the present procurator, Pontius Pilate, but at no time had such widespread horror existed.

The day had hardly dawned when men and women began to gather on the street corners and in the public places to discuss the midnight assault and murder of Cestus and the suicide of the powerful court woman, Paulina. People wondered what it all meant, for they remembered not so long ago Cestus had been very near and very necessary to the procurator, and Paulina certainly was not a whit less powerful than the young centurion had been. Her suicide had followed closely upon the announcement of the death of Cestus, and the unhappy woman had been found by her attendants early the next morning lying upon a couch in her own apartment, the floor beside her dyed with the blood that had flowed from a self-inflicted wound upon the wrist.

But if the cause of the assault and the suicide caused curious tongues to wag, the mysterious disap-

pearance of the young man's body made them run all the faster, but to no purpose. The citizens who had witnessed the assault declared that shortly after the soldiers had left a man and a woman had thrust the curious ones aside, and had carried away the body, yet such was the uncertain light at the time that they could not be recognized; nor were there any who had seen the body after it had been removed from the spot. The whole affair was shrouded in deep mystery, but a curious, though not extraordinary, phase of human nature developed as the day grew older. The people began to remember that Cestus had possessed noble qualities, though a Roman soldier, and bound, therefore, to uphold the laws of his country. Deeds of mercy and kindness that he had performed, but that had been buried in oblivion because of his office, were suddenly unearthed, and in every mouth there began to sound his praise. The soldiers of Rome awoke to the realization that a brave and honorable man had passed from amongst them; that his equal could not be found in the whole length and breadth of Cæsar's domains, and the echo of this realization came so near to the palace of the procurator that Pilate trembled upon his throne for fear of a military uprising against him for degrading the young man as he had. His uneasiness was heightened by the fact that it was openly whispered that the trial of Cestus and his imprisonment had been

the merest farce, and simply a move, or play, on the part of the procurator for public favor.

Before the day had closed the people were ready to welcome Cestus with open arms, or honor his name by appropriate burial, but that being denied them on account of the mysterious absence of his remains, they could only speak of him in the warmest terms, and declare their sorrow for having misunderstood so noble a man.

But of Paulina what a different sentiment existed! Always pleasure loving and filled with a deadly hatred towards the Jewish race, she had lost no opportunity of persecuting those she felt beneath her by the well-directed use of her influence over the procurator. Little wonder it was, therefore, that, though her death shocked the populace because she was a prominent factor in the politics of the day, the grief of the people was not expressed very loudly.

In the company room an air of gloom and grief rested like a pall. Cestus had been truly beloved by the men under him. If he had been slain in battle, his death would have been gloried in as the fitting fate for a brave man, but a cowardly assault in the night was a disgrace and blot upon the Roman government that was felt by every soldier who had served under Cestus. They had made an effort to find the men who had slain him, but without success, which was hardly to be wondered at, since their safety lay

in silence, and a murderer is seldom possessed of enough conscience to voluntarily confess his crime.

Phrates, that doughty old champion and friend of Cestus, was inscrutable. He joined in the praise of Cestus readily enough, but when the disappearance of the body began to be discussed, he was strangely silent. Once a comrade noticed his reticence, and looked him over inquiringly.

"What knowest thou of the whereabouts of the body, Phrates?"

"Why dost thou ask of me such a question?" Phrates answered. "Is it not said that no one knows?"

"Yea, but thou wert his friend, and should know more than the others."

"Thou'rt yet in thy swaddling clothes, and dost make a fool of thyself," gruffly. "Ask thy question of the moon, for saw he not the murder? Take thou my advice, and believe all thou dost hear from the people. It will save thee much worry and doubt. Fools are always guessing things that wise men shun to discuss."

"That may be very true, good Phrates, but I believe thou'rt hiding a secret behind that war-stained countenance of thine. Why not share it with me? I can keep mine own counsel."

"And I will set thee a good example by keeping mine, so far as thou art concerned. Besides, a secret doth not remain so when told to even a friend. I have not admitted to thee that there is a secret."

He turned abruptly and walked away, and the young man stared after him with a sly look on his face.

"Thy face is incapable of deceit, Phrates, and I know thee well," he said to himself.

The day passed without further incident, and the next was ushered in only to sink into eternity until a week had rolled around, and still there came no news of the discovery of the body of Cestus. And the populace—that fickle quantity that knows no constancy—had almost forgotten the suicide of Paulina and the death of Cestus, because the city was again in the throes of a great excitement, this time, however, concerning the Jews more than the Romans. Jesus of Nazareth had entered the city some days ago—the humble carpenter from Galilee—who had been, and was still, preaching some of the most wonderful doctrines and truths ever heard since the beginning of the world. The Jewish people were soon quivering under the strain of intense excitement, for the Man had declared himself of divine origin, and sent to redeem the people from their sins; had dared to state that the priests were hypocrites, and had denounced in uncompromising language some of the practices that had been handed down from generation to generation in the church. The priesthood was outraged and indignant, and the chief priests plotted together how they might destroy him and stop the influence that was engulfing Jerusalem. As from a

distance, the Romans watched the spread of the new religion in passive silence, only interfering when it became necessary to preserve the peace because of Jewish hatred towards the Man "Christus."

But in spite of opposition and persecution, the Man of Galilee went calmly on his way, teaching in the synagogues and healing the sick and maimed, until, in a frenzy of excitement and fear for their office, the plotting of the high priests culminated in the forcible arrest of Jesus. Then was Malchus, the arch-hypocrite, the servant of the high priest, much in evidence in leading the body of men sent out to take him, whereupon one of the disciples of the Nazarene, Peter by name, drew his sword and smote off the ear of the false servant. Those who were in the arresting party were astonished beyond measure when Jesus put out his hand, saying, "Suffer ye thus far," and touched the ear. The member was instantly healed and restored, but the miracle, though ringing through the streets of Jerusalem in a short time, did not serve to lessen the hatred against him, or to make the high priests any the less bitter. In truth, it only made them the more anxious for his death, because they were beginning to fear the Man more than they would admit.

Pilate could not refuse them, though, because he found no fault with the Man, he felt it wrong to deliver him over to his death. But he dared not oppose the powerful Jewish faction existing in the high

priests, and knowing the testimony to be false, he yet allowed them to suit their own pleasure. Thus was committed the foulest murder in the history of the ages, and on the evening of that memorable day, when the streets were crowded with excited throngs of people, Phrates, honest in heart and short in words, sat in the company room with a look of deep wrath on his face.

"See thou what these Jews have done?" he growled to a companion sitting near him. "They have demanded of Pilate, who is afraid to own his soul, that he crucify Christ, the Man who hath done no wrong, except it be that he hath denounced certain sour-faced priests of their religion. Truly, he was a good man, and a brave one, too, or else he would not have dared to go against the high and mighty priests who think the world was made but for them, and that a Roman hath no right to live. Christ was a righteous man, and the dogs," scornfully, "dared to plot his death because he claimed to be the Son of God. What if he did so claim, say I? Was it any of their affair, and could they not leave him in peace, since he was truly doing naught but good?"

"Dost thou believe in his teachings, Phrates?"

"I cannot tell thee whether I believe or not," somewhat perplexedly, "but I did not desire his death. Certain things that he did hath convinced me that he had great power. I am a Roman, and believe not in the God of Israel, but if there be such a God, he could

not be more fittingly represented than by this Man who hath gone about teaching peace and good will. But of Pilate, I say to thee, though it cost me my head, I have nothing but contempt," and with a toss of his head, the veteran arose and left the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

“THOUGH THOU ART A ROMAN.”

Two weeks later, as the morning sun rose in all its glory, throwing a warm radiance over troubled Jerusalem, a soldier clad in the uniform of Cæsar made his way towards the gate of the Valley of Jehosophat, and arriving at Myria's house, knocked softly upon the door. It was quickly opened, and she stood before him with an exclamation of delighted surprise.

“Phrates! Welcome!”

“I greet thee, most gracious lady,” he responded, with a low bow. “Is it well with thee and thine?”

“It is well. Enter.”

He made haste to obey, and when he had done so, turned to her quickly.

“It is said of thee that thou hast embraced the faith of him they called Christus, who claimed to be the Messiah. Is it true?”

She looked him squarely in the eye, and her face betrayed the calmness of her spirit. A newborn sweetness had settled around her mouth.

“It is true, good Phrates, and I am honored in the confession.”

He seized her hand and pressed it heartily, and a strange moisture came into his eyes.

"Then what he hath taught must be wondrous true to interest thy pure soul, gracious lady, and I am glad to know of thy belief. But I came to warn thee of danger, for the city is upturned because of the doctrines of the Nazarene, and those who would follow him are being persecuted on every side. I would put a question to thee, Myria. Thou knowest he hath taught that all men are as brothers. Is thy heart still prejudiced towards those who are of Rome?"

"Nay," she cried quickly; "nay! Hath he not said that we should love all men alike, whether they be Jew or Gentile? Nay, good Phrates, the things that were of old have melted away under the new light that hath entered my soul."

"I could bless thee for that speech, Myria, because it concerns one who is very near to thy heart, even——"

"Nay, good Phrates, I pray thee speak not on that subject," she implored, "for the things that have come between the noble Cestus and I cannot be explained away to his satisfaction, and he hath been of slow speech, not caring to know the reason of things that have passed. Nay! trouble not thyself; we can never be anything closer than friends. Say no more, if thou wouldst not wound me deeply."

"Listen thou to me, child, for I am old enough to speak truthfully to thee and without fear of offence.

The Court of Pilate

I know thou dost love Cestus with all thy heart, and that he loves thee. It is true as thy religion," he cried vehemently, as she tried to interrupt his flow of words, "and I will not be silenced when the happiness of two noble hearts is at stake. I know that thou art brave enough to learn the truth, for thy bravery was shown when thou didst come to me on the night that Cestus was wounded, and did tell me how thou hadst gained from Malchus, in some way only known to thee, the description of the centurion who would witness against thy father. As thou knowest, I recognized the description, and, thinking that Cestus was then on his way to the man's house, I would be away to follow him, and thou wouldst hear of nothing but that thou shouldst accompany me. And it is well that such a strange desire should have seized us, for we would not have been able to save the life of Cestus had we acted otherwise. And I know of thy bravery when the news was brought to thee of the death of thy father the night after he was returned to prison. Though thou wert full of grief, thou didst not give way as is the manner of women. Knowing that thou art so brave, and that a brave man awaits thee, dost think I will allow thee to grieve thy life away? Nay, Myria, I would not have it so."

"I thank thee for thy speech," she said, with downcast eyes, as he paused, "but it cannot be. Cestus will have none of my help, even in his moments of weakness, and hath preferred that my mother wait on

him. I have not even dared to visit in his room when he hath been conscious."

He smiled pityingly.

"Then thou hast denied to Cestus the most exquisite of pleasures. He is a Roman, and proud, and would not ask of thee a favor that hath once been denied. He would go on his own way forever after having once sought and lost, though it break his heart. But I had almost forgotten the good news I bring to thee. Thou knowest that Malchus, thine enemy, was with the party that went out against Christus, and that an impetuous disciple of the Nazarene did strike off his ear. Christus, in mercy and by the exercise of his marvelous power, of which I know nothing, did heal the wound on the instant. But the very fact that a miracle had been performed on Malchus made him an object of deep hatred from the high priests, and he hath been compelled to flee the city in order to save his life. Therefore, thou art well rid of him. Now I would ask a favor of thee. Wilt thou allow me to see Cestus, of whom thou hast cared for this last month?"

"Yea, thou art welcome, Phrates."

"And I will tell him of the plotting that was done by this same Malchus, as thou hast explained to me. Await thou my return, and go in to him after I have left."

"That I cannot do, good Phrates."

He gazed at her long and earnestly, then, with ■

smile, arose and went into the chamber where the young centurion had lain all the weary, sick month that had elapsed. Cestus was lying on a couch as he entered, and his face spoke of the suffering he had endured, though the strong, brave lines about the mouth were unchanged. Phrates approached the couch with a bound, and knelt beside the young man.

“Long life to thee and thine, Cestus,” he exclaimed heartily as his eyes lingered long upon the beloved countenance.

Cestus extended an emaciated hand to the veteran, and for the next few moments found no space wherein to wedge a word, for Phrates’ tongue ran glibly, speaking forth what was in his heart; of the plot of the Jew Malchus; the news of the city, especially that of Christus, the new Messiah, and of Myria’s change of heart. Presently, as he saw that the strength of the young man was not sufficient to the further recital, he arose, and with a wise shake of his head gazed down upon him.

“And now for something that will make thee laugh, good Cestus. The great Pilate, the righteous procurator, he who wears the authority of Cæsar only to drag it in the dust, hath declared a most wondrous thing to me, and it is even this, that if thou wert still living, which he does not know, he would restore thee to thy position at court, and make thee the first centurion of the guards. What thinkest thou of that? If thou art of a mind, thou canst claim his promise

when thou art well and strong, for it was made in the presence of witnesses, and is binding."

"Thou canst say to Pilate for me," Cestus declared, with rising indignation, "that I serve only those who are brave at heart, and cannot take orders from a craven."

Phrates laughed loudly.

"I knew thou wouldst say as much. Then when thou art recovered we will be off for Rome together, for I no more care for the service of such a man. But I tire thee, and have other business. Take thou good care of thyself, and I will come again on the morrow."

He passed out of the room and called to Myria. His quick eye had noted that her mother was not in the house.

"Cestus hath asked that thou bring him some water," he said, with a ready subterfuge. "Wilt thou attend to it at once?"

"I will get it for thee, and thou canst take it in to him," she replied, with a blush of red mantling her cheeks, but he laughed gaily and motioned her away.

"I cannot tarry, and must away. Thou canst not refuse to minister to the sick, and he is in sore need, as he dismissed me with a request to go to thee on the instant."

A sigh of indecision escaped her, but the wily veteran, fearing further argument, fled from the house.

Myria stood for a moment, her brows wrinkled in

doubt; then she hastily looked over the house for her mother. But the search was fruitless, and directly, with a sigh of mingled pleasure and fear, she approached the apartment of Cestus. The door was standing slightly ajar, and she could see the form of the young man stretched out on the couch. As she stood timidly watching him through the door, he turned his face and met her gaze. A flush mounted to her temples; the vessel she was carrying fell to the floor, and an answering color showed in his eager face. In an instant he was on his feet, and, though weak from long confinement, sprang towards her.

“Myria, beloved, thou hast come to me at last, after these weary days of waiting and longing. Thou hast come to tell me that I am forgiven?”

“I have come to bring thee water, Cestus, and to tell thee—that a Jewish maiden hath found her heart safe in thy keeping, though thou art of Rome.”

THE END.

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